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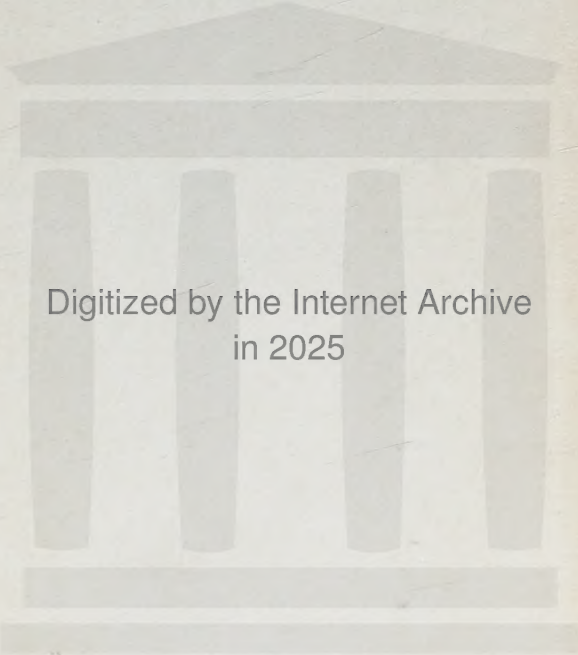
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SUNDAY GOSPELS

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STUDIES FOR THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

John Masterman
BY THE RIGHT REV.

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STANDARD CATHOLIC

YEARLY

SUNDAY GOSPELS

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

(S. Matthew **xxi.** 1-13)

THE Advent season opens with the Gospel that tells of the coming of our Lord to Jerusalem. The story is told in all the four Gospels, and is recognised by all the Evangelists as a definite claim by Jesus Christ to the Messianic office. The three incidents of the story constitute :

A ROYAL CLAIM

Our Lord was already well known in the village of Bethany, and His right to claim the use of the ass is at once recognised by the villagers. According to S. Mark **xi.**, our Lord added "and straightway he will send him back hither." Our Lord was constantly dependent on the willingness of His disciples to place a house (S. Luke **xxii.** 11) or a boat (S. Mark **iii.** 9) or a pitcher (S. John **iv.** 7) at His disposal. So His disciples learned to understand how He depended on their help—how He "had need of" the gifts they could bring to His service. The use of an ass, rather than a war-horse, expresses the peaceable character of the new kingdom (Zech. **ix.** 9). "To this day in the East asses are used, as they are represented in the song of Deborah, by great officials, but only when they are upon civil and not military duty" (*G. A. Smith*).

A ROYAL CHALLENGE

The triumphal entry marks a definite change in our Lord's policy. Hitherto He had been accustomed to warn His disciples against publishing His Messianic claim to the people. But now He deliberately courted publicity, encouraged the disciples to lead the demonstration of the people, and refused, on the demand of the Pharisees, to discourage the praises of the crowd. He threw down a direct challenge to the rulers by thus riding in triumph into the city with a throng of Galilean pilgrims around Him. They could no longer ignore the danger to their authority involved in the claim of this new prophet. Every Advent season reminds us again of this note of challenge. It is the work of the Church to demand of men that they shall not ignore Christ. We must choose our side. If we cannot go forth with the palm-branch and the song, at least we can ask : " Who is this ? " Every " coming " of Christ is a time when men are forced to say whether they are friends or foes of His Kingdom. When the conventions of life are shaken, and the old, easy tolerance is no longer possible, in times like these in which we live to-day, we must meet the challenge of the question : " Are you for Christ or against Him ? "

There is no justification for the idea that the crowd that sang Hosanna was the same as that other crowd that cried, " Crucify Him." The Galilean peasants who had come up for the feast knew and loved " the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee " ; to the rabble who gathered at the judgment-hall of Pilate He was a stranger. " His own received Him not," because they did not know (S. Luke xix. 42 ; Acts iii. 17).

A ROYAL CLEANSING

The need of doves for sacrifice, and of Hebrew money for the Temple offering, had turned even the Temple courts into a place of trade ; and no doubt the Galilean peasants had good cause to complain of the greed of the traffickers who did not scruple to take advantage of them. From this "den of thieves" the fiery indignation of Jesus Christ drove the traders. The high priests, whose special business it was to guard the Temple from desecration, had allowed this infamous traffic to grow up, and probably shared the profits of it (*Edersheim*). It is still true that the judgment of the Advent begins with the House of God (1 Pet. iv. 17). He comes to purify His Church (Mal. iii. 3) ; to cast out the mercenary spirit from His holy place. For there is no danger against which we have more constantly to be on our guard than that of letting the commercial spirit intrude into our holy things, till we may even come to think of the Divine forgiveness as something that can be bought and sold. Our Lord turned the Temple courts from a place of traffic into a place of healing.

The cleansing of the Temple appears, from the other Evangelists, to have taken place on the day following the royal entry. On the significance of His action, and the nature of the abuses that had grown around the Temple-traffic, see *Edersheim*, "Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah," Book III., Ch. V., where *Edersheim* discusses the question whether the cleansing of the Temple in S. John's Gospel was identical with that recorded in the Synoptists.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

(S. Luke xxi. 25-33)

A GREAT deal of attention has recently been given by New Testament scholars to our Lord's apocalyptic teaching. Jewish thought in our Lord's time had inherited from the later prophets a philosophy of history expressed in highly symbolic language, and this language our Lord seems to have adopted as a vehicle of teaching. He spoke in the language of His time, because it was the language that His disciples could understand; but later commentators, to whom the apocalyptic language of later Jewish literature was unfamiliar, have sometimes tried to give a merely literal significance to these discourses of our Lord.

In the previous verses He had been speaking of the Fall of Jerusalem, and His mind travels on from that event to the ages beyond. So He speaks of :

THE COURSE OF HUMAN HISTORY

The disciples cherished hopes of a golden age about to dawn (S. Luke xix. 11; Acts i. 6), but He warns them that the future of the world will be marked by discord and confusion—that even the most established things will be shaken (*c.p.* Amos viii. 9; Joel ii. 30; Heb. xii. 26). Men are always tempted to live in an illusion of security (2 Pet. iii. 4); but we know better to-day than we did a few years ago how this illusion of security is shattered, and how men's hearts fail them for fear as they look forward to the future. History has become

apocalyptic again before our eyes. The reference to the Son of Man coming in a cloud—the luminous cloud or *shekinah* of the Divine Presence (Ex. xiv. 19)—is probably from Daniel vii. 13. In Daniel it means that the brute-Empires give place to the rule of the true humanity, when “the saints of the Most High shall possess the kingdom.” In Christ, humanity will find its true self—out of the shipwreck of human institutions men will look up in their despair for the help that comes from above. It is not by a gradual process of improvement that the victory of the spiritual will be won, but by the coming down of the divinely-human—by the intervention of God. The prayer, “Thy Kingdom come,” is not a prayer for the gradual improvement of human society by natural means, but for the descent into human life of a supernatural power. In times of peace and comfort men are often content with things as they are ; it is only when the established order is shaken that they recognise their need of Christ.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHRISTIAN

Warned by our Lord, His disciples are to expect change and uncertainty in human affairs. As the young green on the trees tells of the coming of the spring, so the Christian man is to discern the signs of the times (S. Matthew xvi. 3), and not be taken unawares when days of confusion and distress of nations come. We are like men living in a country where the houses they build are liable to be shattered by an earthquake. When we forget this, and become absorbed in the political and social life of the time, as though our true home was here, we lose the strength that comes from realising that we have

received "a Kingdom which cannot be moved" (Heb. xii. 28).

But we have not only to realise the instability of earthly things; we must learn to recognise that the crumbling of empires is a sign of the coming of the true Kingdom. "Look up, and lift up your heads." To the Christian man every time of change and uncertainty is a time of hope, for it is a sign that supernatural forces are at work—that the Son of Man is coming; it is a voice in the darkness crying, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh: go ye out to meet Him." So the Church is always to move forward, with her eyes fixed on the future. Her place is not among the things that are passing away, but among the things that are coming. The powers of darkness may seem to rule the present, but it is Christ Who rules the future.

(3) Verse 32 may either be interpreted as carrying the thought back to the earlier verses, in which our Lord speaks of the Siege of Jerusalem, or as giving a wider meaning to the word "generation," and so meaning that the present world-order will go on till the final catastrophe that ushers in the Divine Kingdom. The words have also been interpreted as meaning that the Jewish race (*genea*) will survive through all the long "times of the Gentiles" till the true King comes.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

(S. Matthew xi. 2-10)

THE thought of Advent as a season of preparation naturally recalls S. John the Baptist, the forerunner who came to prepare the way of

the Lord. The Gospel tells of a twofold vindication.

THE VINDICATION OF JESUS CHRIST

It has been suggested that the motive of S. John's question was the strengthening of the faith of his disciples. But it seems more probable that S. John himself felt disappointed and perplexed at the reports that reached him with regard to our Lord's "works" (S. John vii. 4). "Where," he might have asked, "is the purging of the threshing-floor, the fiery baptism of the Spirit?" The Messianic kingdom was not coming in the way he had expected. But, instead of allowing his doubts to rankle, he showed his real loyalty by his prompt challenge: "Art thou the Coming One (the Messiah), or are we to look for someone quite different (*heteros*, not *allos*)?" Our Lord gave no direct answer to the question; He referred S. John to the very works of which he had heard. It was as though He had said, "Think again—the things that I am doing are the very things that the Messiah is pictured by the prophets as doing" (Isa. xxxv. 5, lxi. 1). How often it is true still that what we need is not fresh evidence, but fuller understanding of what we have already (S. John xiv. 9). Things do not happen in the way we expect. "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation," and we are tempted to ask, "Have we deceived ourselves with false hopes?" Yet it is not only the earthquake that shatters the rocks; the gradual work of frost and sun will often crumble them into dust more completely. Love will break stony hearts more effectively than violence; kindness judges us more searchingly than force.

" I waited for His thunder,
His bolts of judgment hurled,
To cleave the rocks asunder,
And shake the startled world ;
While streams from far-off fountains
Sing round me as they flow,
With dust of crumbling mountains,
To feed the fields below.

" For love can break the iron rock
That braves the earthquake's ruder shock."

Our Lord adds a very tender word of remonstrance—a blessing on the man who has the insight to understand and the patience to trust. For the word " offence " (*skandalon*—the word from which our " scandal " comes) *cp.* S. Matthew xvi. 23, 1 Pet. ii. 8.

VINDICATION OF S. JOHN THE BAPTIST

Our Lord's words might have left on the hearers an impression that He did not intend to make, so He took the opportunity, when the Baptist's disciples had withdrawn, to pay a glowing tribute to the great forerunner. He speaks first of his firmness—he was not a man swayed by every wind of opinion ; then of his asceticism—he was not a man who flattered royal ears with pleasant words. If he had been, he would have been in Herod's banqueting hall, not in his prison. What was it, then, that drew the crowds to the Jordan ? It was the recognition of S. John's prophetic message (*see* S. Matthew xxi. 26). But he was more than a prophet, for he was permitted to see the King, for whom he was preparing the way (S. Matthew xiii. 17). His relation with the Messiah was closer and more intimate than that of the greatest of the prophets. In applying Mal. iii. to S. John, our Lord definitely

implied that He was Himself "the Lord" who should "suddenly come to His Temple," for whom the messenger was to prepare the way. Several of our Lord's apostles had been disciples of the Baptist, and our Lord's tribute to their former leader must have comforted them as they thought of him in the gloomy prison of Machærus. For they were gradually learning to feel that the approval of Jesus Christ was better worth winning than all the success or honour that the world could offer. As they heard Christ's "Well done, good and faithful servant," they knew that all was well with the master they loved. It was John Stuart Mill who said that it would not be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

(S. John i. 19-28)

THE Gospel for last Sunday gave us our Lord's verdict on S. John the Baptist; the Gospel for this Sunday gives us S. John's verdict on himself. It was natural that the Jewish authorities should desire to know what claim S. John was making. They do not seem to have felt the same hostility to him that they afterwards felt to our Lord; one reason for this probably was that he made no such personal claim as our Lord made. In this Gospel we notice :

S. JOHN'S REPUDIATION

(I) "I am not the Christ" (*see* Acts xiii. 25 ;

S. Luke iii. 15). "I am not Elijah" (*see* Mal. iv. 5). "I am not that prophet" (the reference is probably to Deut. xviii. 15). A question arises here. Our Lord speaks of S. John as fulfilling the predictions of the coming of Elijah—as being greater than the prophets (S. Mark ix. 13). How then could S. John repudiate the title? The answer is that Jesus Christ could accord an honour that S. John might rightly shrink from claiming. It is not the greatest men who are most conscious of their own greatness. "Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth" (2 Cor. x. 18). Some of the Jews apparently expected a literal return of Elijah; it was against this bare literalness that our Lord warned His disciples (S. Matthew xvii. 10-12). It was "the spirit and power of Elias" for which men were to look (S. Luke i. 17).

S. JOHN'S CLAIM

(2) Pressed for a positive statement, S. John quotes Isa. xl. 3—the voice of one crying, "In the wilderness make straight the way of the Lord." Like the herald who comes to announce the approach of the king, and warn the people to clear the road for the royal procession, S. John desires to turn attention from the messenger to the message. "I am a voice"—a cry in the night, Behold the Bridegroom cometh. But the questioners are not satisfied. Proselytes were admitted into the Jewish community by baptism, but S. John demanded of all who came to him the same recognition of their need of cleansing. Was not this a claim to independent authority? The prophets had foretold that the Messiah would baptize the people (Ez. xxxvi. 25; Zech. xiii. 1); the claim to baptize

seemed like a claim to the Messianic office. S. John's answer is more fully explained by S. Luke iii. 16. Baptism in water spoke of external cleansing, but the true Messianic baptism by fire spoke of the transformation of the whole life (Mal. iii. 2 ; Heb. xii. 29). By its very character, S. John's baptism pointed on to something beyond itself—it was a baptism of preparation. “ In the midst of you, unrecognised by you, standeth the Coming One (*cp.* S. Matthew xi. 3) of Whom I am the forerunner.” The “ you ” is emphatic—S. John already knew (verse 31), for the baptism of Jesus Christ had taken place before this inquiry of the Jewish authorities. How true it is still, that while we are looking for a future coming, Christ is in the midst of us, and we do not recognise Him.

S. JOHN'S HUMILITY

(3) We can see from several incidents (S. John iii. 25 ; iv. 1) how easily a spirit of jealousy might have sprung up between the disciples of the Baptist and those of our Lord. Nothing is more striking in the character of S. John than his splendid humility. “ I am not worthy to be His slave.” The honour of personal attendance on his Master was one he did not claim ; that he offered to some of his disciples (verse 35) ; his work was only to prepare the way. He was “ the friend of the Bridegroom,” whose joy was fulfilled in “ hearing the Bridegroom's voice.” When we remember the disputes of the disciples who should be the greatest, and the contests in the early Church that arose through the intrusion of personal claims, we can recognise the nobility of S. John's refusal to assert his personal claims. The danger of spiritual egotism is specially present in

our own day, with its passion for advertisement. Over all our Christian service we need to write S. John's motto: "He must increase; I must decrease." It is only when we point men away from ourselves to Christ that our service has any value. It is not without significance that many of the most dangerous heresies are called by the name of their founder. S. Paul knew how the personality of the preacher might hinder the Gospel (1 Cor. i.).

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

(S. Matthew i. 18-25)

ALL commentators have noticed that, while S. Luke tells the story of the Nativity from the point of view of the mother of our Lord, S. Matthew tells it from the point of view of Joseph. This Gospel tells us almost all that is recorded of the character of the man who was chosen by God to take the place of a father in the early life of our Lord.

THE PERPLEXITY OF JOSEPH

It is difficult to conceive of a situation better calculated to test a man's character than that in which Joseph found himself. Three special characteristics are brought out in the story. (1) His sense of responsibility. He was a just man—that is, one who recognised the obligations of the law (*c.p.* S. Luke i. 6; ii. 25). If things were as they seemed, a wrong had been done that he had no right simply to condone. The Mosaic law was stern in such matters, and justice demanded that the law should be obeyed. (2) His desire for mercy. Pity

checked personal resentment. So far as justice allowed, he desired to spare his betrothed. Betrothal was regarded as legally binding, and only capable of being cancelled by a "bill of divorcement" (Deut. xxiv. 1). (3) His careful consideration. The tradition that Joseph was much older than the Virgin Mary finds some support in the careful deliberation with which he acted. Balancing the claims of justice and compassion, he "thought on these things," waiting for some clear guidance—unwilling to act on impulse. It is a noble picture of a good man anxious to do right in perplexing circumstances; facing the fiery trial with honest heart.

THE ANGELIC REASSURANCE

Three times in these chapters S. Matthew pictures Joseph as being guided by a dream (Ch. ii. 13, 22). Here he is told: (1) That what seemed a dishonourable thing was an honour without precedent (S. Luke i. 28). The creative power of the Divine Spirit had superseded the processes of nature. May we not believe that the fact that he had, even in thought, wronged her, would give a special tenderness to the care with which Joseph watched over the Virgin and the Holy Child? (2) The child was to be called Jesus (*the salvation of Jehovah*)—not an uncommon name among the Jews in its Greek and Hebrew form (Joshua). But this Jesus was to deliver His people, not from Roman rule or from external dangers, but from the spiritual enemies that imperilled its life more deeply. So the Christmas message was: "Unto you is born a Saviour."

The note added here by the evangelist raises some difficult questions (on which see G. A. Smith,

"Isaiah," Vol. I., p. 115-8). The main thought in the mind of the prophet seems to be that a child shall be born whose coming shall express the idea of the divine Presence with the chosen people. Perhaps Isaiah did not realise the full significance of what he wrote.

THE OBEDIENCE OF JOSEPH

The Evangelist gives no details of the Nativity ; he only records the fact in connection with the quiet faithfulness of Joseph, who gave the protection of honourable marriage to the Virgin Mary, that no shadow of slander might darken the holy life of which he had become so mysteriously the guardian. Notice the exact correspondence between command and obedience : "Thou shalt call His name Jesus"—"He called His name Jesus." We need not suppose that Joseph understood the full meaning of the angel message. Only he knew that a duty had been laid on him in which he must not fail. He is perhaps the supreme example of the way in which God has chosen to depend for the fulfilment of His purpose on the faithful obedience of simple-hearted men (*cp.* Heb. xi. 8). Out of sorrow and perplexity he had been led through faith to service, and by the cradle of Bethlehem he was crowned with an honour such as no king can claim. He lived to see the child Jesus "in His Father's House" (S. Luke ii. 49), and then his figure recedes into the background ; his appointed task done. It is almost certain that he died before the beginning of our Lord's public ministry, but more than that we do not know ; nor do we know how the Evangelist heard the story of sorrowful perplexity transformed into glad obedience.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

(S. Luke ii. 15-21)

THE Gospel for this day was originally only verse 21. The addition of the story of the shepherds connects the day with the thought of Christmas.

THE VISIT OF THE SHEPHERDS

The earliest revelation of the Incarnation was given, not to "the wise and prudent," but to simple men of honest heart (compare the earliest disciples). Three things are told us here about the shepherds.

(1) They came to see. It is the special characteristic of Christianity that it claims to be founded on facts—things that really happened. So it asks for the verification of experience. "Come and see." The angel's story might have seemed only a beautiful dream if the shepherds had not come with haste to test its truth. And, on the other hand, the humble surroundings of the Holy Child might have obscured the truth if they had not heard the angel song. In place of the angel's message, we have the testimony of nineteen centuries of Christian experience. But we must still verify for ourselves the things that have been told us. Notice how the shepherds encouraged each other to "go even unto Bethlehem." They came, not as individuals, but as a company of inquirers. So the first act of Christian worship was a procession of working men to a stable.

(2) They testified of what they had seen. Like the lepers of Israel (2 Kings vii. 9) they could not

keep the good news to themselves. Their story awakened wonder, but apparently not conviction, for we are not told of any other journeys to Bethlehem. Only one heart accepted the truth as the verification of its own deep thoughts. What the Virgin Mary could not tell, she kept and pondered.

3. They rejoiced. They did not sing as they came, but they sang as they went away. The first Christmas carol was sung by angels; the second was sung by labourers as they went back to their work. So worship and work were linked together by the bond of praise. For Christmas means the coming of God into common things and humble places, that men may find Him there and rejoice. The joy of Christmas is the rediscovery of God.

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST

By His circumcision, our Lord became subject to the law. Just as by His birth He took His place in the human family, so by His circumcision He took His place in the Jewish national life. As He consecrated human life by His Nativity, so He consecrated national life by His circumcision. For that ancient Jewish rite was the expression, carried on from generation to generation, of Israel's special call and destiny. A non-national humanity—a humanity cut off from the influences of a historic past and conscious membership in a community with common hopes and ideals—such a humanity would not be a true humanity. Patriotism is too noble a quality to be absent from the life of the perfect man. But circumcision not only brought a male child into the life of the nation—it brought him there by the way of suffering. It is one of many primitive customs by which the shedding of blood is associated

with the reception of a new member into the tribal system. There is a deep truth underlying all these ceremonies—a truth that has come home to us all of late—that the individual must give his life—shed his blood—for the nation to which he belongs. We are bound together, not by a claim to common superiority, but by the obligation of common sacrifice. True patriotism is manifested, not in triumph, but in suffering. The Servant of Jehovah of Isaiah liii.—“wounded for our transgressions”—may have been, in the mind of the prophet, his own nation, persecuted and oppressed because of its faithfulness to the true God ; but only one life perfectly fulfilled the prophetic ideal. So the circumcision of Jesus Christ gathered up the dim gropings after truth of earlier ages, and carried them forward towards the supreme sacrifice of the cross.

We are born into the life of a nation, not for self-indulgence, but for self-oblation, that through the sacrifice of the individual, the nation may serve the cause of humanity—that through our seed, too, “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” That is the Christian doctrine of nationality.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

(S. Luke ii. 41-52)

ONLY once is the veil that hides the first thirty years of our Lord's earthly life lifted. The simple story told by S. Luke has nothing in common with the puerile and grotesque legends of a later time in the apocryphal gospels. It is the story

of a boyish adventure, with no supernatural accompaniments, yet all the more full of spiritual significance. It tells of a threefold Epiphany.

THE REVELATION TO THE HOLY CHILD

At the age of about thirteen a Jewish boy came of age religiously, and took his place in the national religious life as a "son of the Law." Before that time, devout parents would naturally take a boy to some of the great festivals, so that he might understand something of the religious life into which he would shortly enter. Little as we know, or can know, about the development of our Lord's human consciousness, we can recognise certain stages in the growth of His self-consciousness. One such stage, S. Luke certainly connects with this first visit to Jerusalem since His infancy. To Him the religious associations of the Passover revealed their deeper meaning. The Temple was His Father's House—the place where He was conscious of feeling at home. It is not likely that the Virgin Mary had as yet told the Child the holy mystery of His birth, or that the human mind of Jesus, growing to maturity from the natural immaturity of childhood (*see* verse 52) had yet realised itself as the vehicle of a divine personality. Perhaps we may regard the baptism of our Lord as the point at which that realisation became complete. "All the fullness of the Godhead" was mysteriously subject to human conditions; yet He was not less truly divine at every stage of human life.

REVELATION TO THE VIRGIN MARY AND JOSEPH

The Passover lasted seven days, but many of the

visitors from a distance left after the great sacrifices of the first two days had been completed. Joseph and Mary apparently did this, while Jesus stayed behind, too absorbed with new thoughts to realise that the Galilean party had started homewards.

S. Luke, whose story must have come from the Virgin Mary as its original source, represents the realisation of all that was implied in the Annunciation message as growing gradually in the mind of the holy mother. Our Lord's reply to the loving reproach, "Why hast Thou thus dealt with us?" is, in effect, "You might have known where to find Me; in My Father's House" (there is little doubt that this is the right translation, rather than "about My Father's business"). The human authority, to which He was subject (verse 51) must recognise that a higher authority would assert itself; that the divine would claim exclusive control over the life that had for a while been entrusted to its keeping. The bonds of human relationship were not violently broken, but gently disentangled. Through what seemed like a premature assertion of independence, a loving warning was conveyed to "Joseph and His mother" that the care of the Holy Child was gradually passing out of their hands. The Divine Father was calling His Child.

THE REVELATION TO THE DOCTORS

We must not think of Jesus as attempting to instruct the rabbis in the Court of the Temple. Informal instruction was no doubt given to the boys who came up to the feast, the young learners sitting around the teacher and questioning him from time to time about the subject of his teaching. The teachers were astonished, we may be sure, not

at our Lord's precocious knowledge, but at the spiritual insight that showed itself in His answers and questions. Every teacher learns from his own scholars—and most when they are least self-conscious. The rabbis learnt that things hidden from the wise and prudent might be revealed to babes. A new Epiphany had come to them, as it came to the shepherds and the wise men.

The closing verse of the Gospel asserts the reality of the humanity of our Lord. His childhood was not abnormal, as the apocryphal gospels picture it. He grew and learnt and made friends in the village life of Nazareth (1 Sam. ii. 26). Some early teachers, in their effort to assert the full divinity of our Lord, drifted into the heresy of denying the reality of His humanity. Against any such danger S. Luke's story seems designed to protect us.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

(S. John ii. 1-11)

THIS Gospel tells us of the first Epiphany of our Lord to His disciples. The temptation in the wilderness was connected with our Lord's consciousness of miraculous powers, which He refused then to use for the supply of His own needs. Only a very little while after, in the presence of the little group of disciples whom He had gathered during a brief stay in Jerusalem, He used these powers to supply the needs of others. So we have here :

A MANIFESTATION OF SYMPATHY

It was afterwards made a reproach against our

Lord that He shared in the social life of the people (S. Matthew xi. 19). As Son of Man, He sympathised with human joys and sorrows, and S. John's Gospel, the Gospel of the Incarnation, brings out with special clearness this human sympathy. Though He was "the Man of Sorrows" we must never think of Him as morose, gloomy, isolated from the world of men. So He began His public ministry at a wedding feast, and He closed it at another feast, at which the wine of sacrifice became the pledge and promise of reunion and gladness (S. Matthew xxvi. 29). The miracle at Cana has often been used as an argument against abstinence from intoxicating drinks. The argument is not a valid one, for those who advocate total abstinence generally do so, not on the ground that all alcoholic drinks are at all times and in all circumstances evil, but that in the special circumstances of our own time and nation, that which is not in itself unlawful may be inexpedient (1 Cor. vi. 12). What we can learn from the miracle is that it is no part of the Christian Gospel to frown upon the friendly intercourse of social life. We may test the rightness of our social gatherings by asking ourselves whether we could invite Him to be present. The Christian man has no right to be where his Master would not be welcome.

A MANIFESTATION OF AUTHORITY

Our Lord's reply to His mother, though not harsh, as it sounds in our English translation, was a warning that His action must not be guided by impulse or mere kindly feeling. The words "Mine hour is not yet come," have puzzled most commen-

tators. Perhaps we may paraphrase the sentence, "Lady, you do not understand, I cannot yet manifest My real Self." So the need is supplied almost, as it were, secretly, so that only the disciples who were sitting round Him, and the servants, who were probably too busy to realise fully what had happened, knew how the wine had been provided. We recognise the same note of authority in the instruction to the servants. But His power to act depends on human obedience. The disciples learnt thus early in their discipleship that commands that seemed unreasonable demanded obedience; only then did their meaning become clear. We obey in order to understand (S. John vii. 17).

A MANIFESTATION OF POWER

Several of the Fathers point out that what Christ did instantaneously is exactly what God does every year, when "what the clouds pour forth is turned into wine by the doing of the same Lord." It is clear that the purpose of the miracle was not only, or even chiefly, to supply wine to the guests, but that our Lord took the opportunity of the simple human need to teach His disciples their earliest lessons about His kingdom. They learnt how He could supply their needs, but they learnt also a deeper lesson. The words of the governor of the feast (as so often in S. John's Gospel) had a deeper meaning than he knew. Life offers its best wine to the young; as the feast proceeds the wine grows poorer, till at last it seems exhausted, "and the mere lees is left to us to drink." But in the new kingdom "the best is yet to be" (Isa. xl. 31); at the point where human resources

fail, divine grace intervenes, and our empty chalice of gladness is full again.

There is a late tradition that the bridegroom at whose marriage feast this miracle was wrought was S. John and that he left the feast to follow Jesus. If this were so, it would account for the authority with which the Virgin Mary, S. John's aunt, addressed the servants. But it is more probable that S. John had already been called (with S. Andrew, *see* Chapter i. 37), and was one of the little company of disciples who saw the miracle, and "believed on Him."

How often we are like the guests at the feast, who went away without realising whose hand had provided for their need. "Things provided came without the sweet sense of providing."

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

(S. Matthew viii. 1-13)

THIS Gospel tells us of the Epiphany of Jesus Christ as the healer of men. These two miracles are the first miracles of healing recorded in detail in S. Matthew's Gospel; they open a section of the Gospel in which the evangelist has recorded a group of miracles, immediately following the group of discourses that we call the Sermon on the Mount. It is interesting to notice that in the case of both applicants no doubt is expressed as to the power of Christ, the only doubt is whether the particular need comes within the scope of His work. The power of Christ was independent of all human faith or virtue, but the exercise of that

power was subject to conditions. Our Lord's answer was often "I will if thou wilt" (S. John v. 6).

THE LEPER

The peculiar repulsiveness of the disease of leprosy, and the fact that in the Old Testament it had been taken as a picture of sin, gives special significance to this miracle of healing. The desire of the leper to be "made clean" is not only a desire for healing, but for restoration to the fellowship of human society. A leper was condemned to isolation from human fellowship, just as a sinner is condemned to isolation from spiritual fellowship. The "cleansing" of sin means the restoration of the sinner to his place in the great society of God.

There are two points in the story on which S. Matthew lays stress. (1) The touch of Jesus. It is very unlikely that this act was a deliberate setting aside of the legal prohibition (Lev. xiii. 44); we should rather see in it a natural impulse of sympathy. The man had been "out of touch" with human life; it was the touch of the Son of Man that restored to him his rights as a man. It was the touch of restoration. We read in the Gospels of fever (S. Matthew viii. 15), blindness (S. Matthew ix. 29), deafness (S. Mark vii. 33), healed by the touch of Jesus. (*See also* S. Matthew xiv. 36; S. Luke xxii. 51.) (2) The instruction: "show thyself to the priest." (*Cp.* S. Luke xvii. 14.) Our Lord did not come to overturn the existing legal system or encourage His followers to be disloyal to the properly constituted authorities. Before the man began to proclaim his cure publicly (that is probably the meaning of the prohibition), he was to render due obedience to the regulations

of the Jewish law. May we not see in this a warning against the idea that the direct contact of the sinner with Christ warrants neglect of the discipline of the Church? On the effect of his disobedience, *see* S. Mark i. 45.

THE CENTURION'S SERVANT

S. Matthew's account of this miracle differs in several particulars from that of S. Luke (Ch. vii.). The special significance of the incident is that the applicant was a Gentile—a Roman centurion (possibly a proselyte). It is also one of the cases (*cp.* S. Mark ii. 5; S. Matthew xv. 28) in which the faith of one brings healing to another. There are three notable facts about the centurion mentioned in this Gospel. (For his kindness to the Jewish people, *see* S. Luke vii. 5.) (1) His affection for his sick slave-boy (S. Matthew calls him his "boy"; S. Luke his "slave"). Such affection was not uncommon in the Roman world. (*See* Shakespeare, "Julius Cæsar," Act iv., sc. 3.) The boy was suffering from some painful form of paralysis and was dying (S. Luke). (2) His faith. It was an intelligent faith, based on the recognition that the spiritual world was a world of authority and obedience no less than the empire of which he was an officer. Jesus Christ came to restore the divine order which had been broken by the disorder of sin. There is no reason to suppose that the centurion saw the full significance of his words; but he recognised that such authority as our Lord exercised could act through words of power as well as through personal contact—a truth that the disciples only gradually learnt to understand. (3) His humility. As Augustine beautifully says,

“ By calling himself unworthy, he showed himself worthy for Christ to come not only into his house, but into his heart.” The centurion is represented as a man of exceptional devotion and kindness ; it is a good man who is most likely to be conscious of his unworthiness. When we sing :

“ I am not worthy, Holy Lord,
That Thou should'st come to me,”

are we always sincere ? (*Cp.* S. Luke v. 8.)

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

(S. Matthew viii. 23-34)

IN all three Gospels these two miracles are associated together. They reveal our Lord's control of the natural and supernatural worlds—unless we regard the storm, as the evangelists probably did, as the result of supernatural agency, the activity of the “ Prince of the power of the air ” (Eph. xi. 2). Will is the ultimate force of the natural, as well as of the spiritual world (S. Luke xvii. 6) ; it may be permitted to evil spirits to control natural forces, as the demons were suffered to enter into the swine. Yet, in the end, wind and storm fulfil His word (Psa. cxlviii. 8). In both miracles there is revealed

THE FEARLESSNESS OF JESUS.

It was no ordinary storm that terrified experienced sailors accustomed to the sudden squalls that came down on the lake. But in the sleep of Jesus we may see not only an evidence of weariness, but

also an evidence of trust. In Him Psalm iv. 8 was perfectly fulfilled. Compare S. Peter in prison (Acts xii. 6). Our Lord's last words on the cross (St. Luke xxiii. 46) were a summary of His whole life. He could sleep through the storm because His life was safe in His Father's keeping.

On the shore He was confronted with a new danger. Two fierce maniacs, living among the tombs by the lakeside, terrorised the neighbourhood, so that no man dared to pass that way. They came out to meet Jesus, but their ferocity quailed before His calm fearlessness. The powers of evil recognised their vanquisher, and the challenge of defiance turned into a plea for mercy. The disciples learned that they need not fear the powers of darkness, for Christ was stronger than them all (S. Luke xi. 22; x. 17, 18).

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

"He rebuked the winds and the sea" (Psa. lxxxix. 9). If we believe that Jesus was divine, it does not seem strange that the laws of nature should be subject to His will. He did not habitually interfere with the natural order—it was enough that the disciples should be taught to understand that the world of nature, no less than human life, was subject to His authority. If once we allow ourselves to believe that the laws of nature are unchangeable, prayer loses much of its meaning.

He asserted His authority over the forces of nature; and then He confronted darker forces, evil powers that had enslaved human lives, so that the man who spoke is an example of what psychologists call "double personality," since the words are sometimes his and sometimes those of the evil

spirits within him. It is important to notice that Jesus did not command the evil spirits to enter into the swine; He commanded them to come out of the man, but He "suffered" them to do what they asked—a vain request, for they could only destroy their new home. It is a striking fact that in all cases where Jesus came into contact with demon-possessed men we never hear of any attempt to resist His authority (*contrast* Acts xix. 16). The world of darkness knew itself vanquished when it was confronted with "God manifest in the flesh."

THE TESTING OF MEN

In their hour of danger the disciples turned to Jesus. They had learnt to say, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee"; they had not yet learnt to say, "I will trust and not be afraid." And though He rebuked their "little faith," He did not rebuke them for disturbing His rest with their cry for help. But the men of Gadara forgot the danger from which He had delivered them, and wanted to be left alone. Perhaps the destruction of the swine was meant to teach the people that if Jesus stayed among them all that they possessed must be His if He claimed it. They shrank from the sacrifice, and only prayed to be left undisturbed; so He departed from them.

Notice the three petitions—the petition of the disciples to be saved, of the evil spirits to be spared, of the people of Gadara to be left alone—all three were the outcome of fear, all three were granted. But it was only to the disciples that the answer became a blessing.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

(S. Matthew xiii. 24-30)

THIS parable has often been expounded (as in the controversy with the Donatists), as referring to the Church ; or as a picture of the individual life, with its mixture of good and evil impulses. Both these applications, especially the latter, are within limits legitimate, but our Lord Himself, in explaining the parable, told His disciples that " the field is the world "—or, in other words, that He was giving them a picture of the development of human society. So regarded, the parable conveys three lessons of vital importance.

HUMAN SOCIETY TWOFOLD IN ORIGIN

The mystery of evil (" whence then hath it tares ? ") has perplexed human thought from the beginning. The one intolerable solution is to attribute evil to God, for if good and evil alike come from Him as their source, then we cannot think of Him as possessing any moral character, and morality becomes meaningless (S. James i. 13). Man's heedlessness (" while men slept ") gave the opportunity for evil to find its way into a world made good by God. But its source is in a personal agency hostile to God, an evil will that exists by divine permission but not by divine appointment. That was the first lesson that our Lord conveyed to His disciples in this parable. The efforts of some modern thinkers to explain away evil as " the shadow cast by good " have this great danger, that they may lead us to tolerate evil instead of hating it and

fighting against it. "O world, as God has made it! All is beauty." But the world is not as God has made it. Human society will some day be "as God has made it," and then it will be beautiful again.

HUMAN SOCIETY TWOFOLD IN DEVELOPMENT

Good and evil grow together. The disciples were not to think of the future as marked by the steady advance of good and the steady decline of evil. There is a double evolution in human history. The same forces that ripen the goodness of the world, ripen the evil. The parable touches on the problem of God's apparent toleration of evil men and things. Good and evil are so entangled together in human history that to remove the one would be to destroy much of the other. If there were no corruption from which the world needed to be saved, how could goodness find scope for service and sacrifice? (Rom. v. 20). But the thought is even deeper. Good and evil are often so much alike that we may mistake the one for the other. Bravery in a wrong cause; love for an unworthy object; art that ministers to evil instincts—are these wheat or tares? It is only when human character has fully developed that its real nature can be recognised.

HUMAN SOCIETY TWOFOLD IN DESTINY

Matthew Arnold described the world as :

"a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

But this will not always be so. In the end, so Jesus told His disciples, the choice between good and evil

will become clear, and men will have to stand on God's side or against Him. In our Lord's teaching, the drama of world-history ends with a great separation (S. Matthew xxv. 46, &c.). As there are two sowings, so there are two harvests. Probably the main lesson that our Lord wanted His disciples to learn was that if God seemed to tolerate evil, it was only in order that there might never be "one lost good." God will give every man the fullest chance of identifying himself with good; all in human society that does not in the end respond to the opportunity must perish (Rev. xxi. 8).

God's tolerance of evil must not be mistaken for indifference. He is "not willing that any should perish." He can perform the miracle of changing tares into wheat. Yet men may remain "tares" still if they will. That is the awful truth of human freewill.

Tares are not a poisonous crop; they are merely useless (S. Matthew v. 13), like Browning's "lives that came to nothing"; like the unfruitful tree that did no harm but only cumbered the ground (S. Luke xiii. 7). Their condemnation is that they waste the resources of the field that might nourish useful grain. It is not necessary to be actively bad to share the condemnation of "the children of the wicked one"; moral indolence may lead to the same doom.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

(S. Matthew xxiv. 23-31)

THIS Gospel, like the Collect for the day, is selected so that it may be suitable either for this season or for the second Sunday before

Advent, for which it is sometimes used. It tells of the Epiphany of Jesus Christ in history, with special reference to the period of the Fall of Jerusalem, but with a wider reference also to the whole course of world-history. The whole of this discourse is couched in highly symbolic language gathered from Old Testament prophecies. While it is probably impossible for us to understand the full significance of a discourse that left the disciples bewildered, we can see that our Lord's purpose was to give the Church a threefold warning :

A WARNING AGAINST CREDULOUSNESS

At all great crises of history, new religions spring up to claim men's allegiance—new gospels, each with its hidden "Christ" in the desert or in the secret place ; with its "signs and wonders." Even the elect may be deceived. How are we to interpret our Lord's words that follow ? They seem to lay stress on two facts : (1) That the next age of human history would open not with a secret coming, but with a manifestation that the world would be forced to realise, and (2) that the Christ of that last Epiphany would not be a localised, but a universal presence. The underlying truth is that the Incarnation is God's last revelation of Himself to men. There will be no fresh incarnations—no other Christs—no religions superior to Christianity. In the end, it will be the Son of Man who will dominate the last chapter of human history.

FALSE OPTIMISM

The words that follow were probably a well-known proverb (*see* Job xxxix. 30). They have

been explained in many different ways. On the whole, it seems most likely that our Lord intended a warning against the habit of mind that refused to face the certainty of Divine judgment. Wherever human societies had lost their spiritual vitality, there the angels of the judgment of God would swoop down as inevitably as the vultures in the desert swoop down on the carcass of a dead animal left behind by the caravan. God's moral law is inexorable :

“ Though the wheels of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small ;
Though in patience long He waiteth,
With exactness grinds He all.”

The Fall of Jerusalem was the first great evidence of the exactness of the judgment of God—and all human history is subject to the same law. Where any spiritual life remains, God may spare (Gen. xviii. 23-32 ; S. Luke xiii. 8) ; but when that life flickers and dies, the doom of the city or nation cometh swiftly. Neither material prosperity, nor intellectual eminence, nor military success, can save it, any more than a carcass can be saved from the vultures by beautiful robes or shining armour.

AGAINST FALSE SECURITY

The imagery here is derived from the Prophets who describe great upheavals in human society in symbolic language as the darkening of the sun and the falling of the stars. Sun, moon and stars seem to look down unmoved on human changes (Psa. viii. 3), but our Lord warns His disciples that even the most stable foundations of human life will be overturned (Heb. xii. 26). Men are always

prone to the illusion of security (2 Pet. iii. 4), a belief in the stability of the existing order. And this sense of security leads to forgetfulness of God and the over-valuation of material things (Psa. xlix. 11). So our Lord tells His disciples that there is nothing stable but His Kingdom. The "sign of the Son of Man" is a reference to Dan. vii. 13, and the mourning of the nations to Zech. xii. 10 (*cp.* Rev. i. 7), though here the mourning seems less the mourning of repentance than the mourning of despair.

A FINAL ASSURANCE

Amid the convulsions of human society, God does not forget His own. The scattering of the nations is the gathering of the elect (Mal. iii. 17). It is in the night of the world that the virgins go forth to meet the bridegroom; among the ruins of a crumbling empire, S. Augustine writes his *De Civitate Dei*. The insecurity of human things is like a trumpet call to the Church to realise her unity and lift up her head, for her redemption draweth nigh. Only at the manifestation of Christ will the union of his Church be complete.

SEPTUAGESIMA

(S. Matthew xx. 1-16)

THIS parable has been interpreted in many ways, some of them extremely fanciful. Its real meaning depends on S. Peter's question at the end of the previous chapter. There was a touch of self-righteousness, and perhaps of distrust, in the question: "What shall we have

therefore?" It seemed to suggest that they might have done more wisely to make terms before they left all and followed Christ. So in the parable our Lord sketches two types of relationship—the relationship based on contract and "rights," and the relationship based on confidence and grace.

CONTRACT AND "RIGHTS"

He "agreed with them for a penny a day." It was a businesslike contract—so much work for so much wages. Jewish thought had gradually come to interpret the "covenant" of the nation with God as of this character (Gen. xxviii. 20–22). In return for its obedience the nation was to have a preferential claim on the Divine favour. So the idea that the Gentiles should have an equal place in the favour of God (Eph. iii. 6) seemed to involve a breach of contract. It is the spirit of the elder son of the parable (S. Luke xv. 28), and it is always liable to recur whenever we think of our relation with God as a kind of contract of service.

Our Lord shows how this mercenary spirit leads to: (1) The alienation of the labourers from their master. When the cash-nexus had been broken, no further bond remained. There was no scope for grace on the one side, or gratitude on the other. Their reward "was not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (Rom. iv. 4). And because they could not trust the householder at the beginning, they could not trust him at the end, and saw in his generosity to their fellow-labourers only an injustice to themselves.

(2) The alienation of the labourers from their fellow-labourers. The complaint they made was true—as true as the complaint of the elder brother

(S. Luke xv. 29) ; but the spirit that prompted it was ungenerous and selfish. They were unable to find a source of gladness in the good fortune of others (*contrast* S. Luke xv. 6, 7). It is possible to work in the Master's vineyard and yet to lack the Master's spirit ; to be so eager to claim our privileges that we miss the greatest of them all—the privilege of fellowship with the “ God of all grace.”

CONFIDENCE AND GRACE

Of the labourers hired later we are told (1) that their idleness was due to lack of opportunity, not to unwillingness to work. No man had hired them. So the standard of their payment at the end was not what they had done, but what they would have done if life had given them a fuller opportunity. “ ’Tis not what man does that exalts him, but what man would do.” In judging other men's lives, we have always to remember the hindrances that have kept them from the full development of their powers. (2) That they left the question of their remuneration to the householder. They made no bargain—they needed work too badly. And because they made no claim, they received the full wage for a day's work. Their “ faith was counted for righteousness ” (Rom. iv. 5). So the answer to S. Peter's question was that God is “ wont to give more than either we desire or deserve.” He is not a hard taskmaster, as the man with one talent foolishly thought (S. Matthew xxv. 24).

The labourers hired at the eleventh hour were not “ paid off ” like those who had worked all day. They still owed a debt to the householder—the

debt of gratitude. If they were true men, they would have come early next day to try to repay unexpected generosity with better service. Grace means that we are always in God's debt; He always gives us more than we can give back even when we do our best.

Trench quotes two sayings of Seneca that bear on this parable: "He whose eyes are on the goods of another is ill-content with his own"; "No one can at once grudge and be grateful."

The two closing sentences are our Lord's comment on the parable. Both occur in other connections (S. Luke xiii. 30; S. Matthew xxii. 14). The special point they emphasise is the reversal of human standards of judgment by the final Divine verdict. The "called" are all who work in the Master's vineyard; the "chosen" are those who share the Master's spirit of self-forgetful generosity.

SEXAGESIMA

(S. Luke viii. 4-15)

TO the disciples of Christ this first parable was a challenge and an encouragement. It was a challenge, because this new method of teaching meant that they would have to think out the meaning of what Jesus Christ said. At first He had taught them simply and directly, but as their power of understanding grew He asked for more effort on their part. And it was an encouragement, for it told them that want of success was not always the fault of the preacher or of the message. When they went out to preach they would find many

unresponsive listeners. And so, in this parable, He told them of some of the causes of human unresponsiveness to God's grace.

The underlying thought of the whole parable is that human lives cannot fulfil their true purpose unless something from above comes down into them. The ground needs the seed. But the seed needs the ground, too; the divine life which God gives must be nourished and cultivated by human effort. Only once in all human history—in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ—did the seed fall into perfectly prepared soil. In every other life something of the divine gift is wasted. What are the reasons for this waste? Jesus Christ gives three illustrations of causes that hinder men from making full use of what God gives them. Let us look at them in order.

ON THE WAYSIDE

There is *the seed on the wayside*. Here we have a picture of lives that have been trodden by the feet of every passer-by till they have grown hard and unresponsive. They have never had a fair chance; and now it seems impossible for religion to find any way in. Modern England is full of such lives. Somehow the hard surface must be loosened, the feet of the world kept off. They need to be sheltered and cared for, till the hard ground grows soft again.

THE STONY GROUND

Then there is *the seed on the stony ground*—the shallow soil with the rock just below. Here the hindrance is of a different kind. Everything is superficial. There are lives that welcome the

Gospel, seem full of promise of rapid fruitfulness—and then all the spiritual promise dries up. Shallow lives! The conditions of modern life are particularly adapted to produce such lives. But it is only the dynamite of God's grace that can blast the rock below, so that the waters that spring far down may come up through the broken rock. The little plants that grow on the moraine of Alpine glaciers often have only a very little earth on the surface, but their roots go down through the shingle to the moisture far beneath. No Christian life can flourish unless it is *deep rooted*.

AMONG THORNS

Then there is the seed *sown among the thorns*. Here again all seems well for a little while. But the fault here is that the soil is too receptive, it takes in all that the wind brings. And so it is overcrowded, and in overcrowded lives it is generally the rank-growing weeds that manage to survive. How gravely modern life has increased this danger of overcrowding! So many things claim a place in our thoughts and activities. And when we find our lives over-full, it is generally religion that is crowded out.

TRUE TO LIFE

How true these types are to life—the man to whom religion seems to mean nothing, because the feet of the world have trodden over his life till it has grown hard; the man who will always listen, and very cheerfully start on the effort to live the Christian life, but whose shallow nature will never keep up the attempt for long; and the man who takes into his life all that comes along—good, bad

and indifferent—and ends by crowding the good out of his life because he will not weed out the evil.

Contrast the last picture—the man of honest and good heart, who (1) listens, unlike the hardened man, (2) holds fast, unlike the superficial man, (3) and endures, unlike the overcrowded man, whose attitude towards life is just to let things come and fill up his life as they will.

The ground cannot change itself. It is not the fault of the field if it is hard or shallow or full of weeds. But human hearts can be changed; and if we find that the religion we profess does not “bring forth in us the fruit of good living,” we must ask ourselves whether the fault is in us, and resolutely determine by God’s help to amend our lives. Receptivity begins with repentance.

QUINQUAGESIMA

(S. Luke xviii. 31-43)

THE story of blind Bartimæus is told in the first three Gospels. It was one of the last of the miracles of Jesus, performed when He had steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, knowing that He was going to His death there. Even with that great tragedy before Him, He had still :

“A heart at leisure from itself,
To soothe and sympathise.”

TWO CONTRASTS

First, the contrast between the blind man as he was, and the same man when he had been healed.

He was *blind*—cut off from a whole world of reality ; he was *sitting*—cut off from the life of progress and movement ; he was *begging*—with nothing to give. That is what human life is apart from Jesus Christ—it cannot see, it cannot move, it cannot give. Then all was changed—he *saw*, he *followed*, he *glorified God*. That is what the Christian life means—realisation, progress, praise.

Then there is the contrast in the behaviour of the people. They began by trying to suppress the inconvenient appeal. It is what we are all inclined to do. As we cannot cure the sorrows of the world, let us try to forget them. So the disciples said of the hungry multitude, "Send them away." But when they had realised the healing power of Jesus, all this was changed. They all *gave praise unto God*. Wherever Jesus comes He awakens human sympathy and gladness. We cannot be indifferent to the needs of others if we follow Him. And the spirit of praise grows in the atmosphere of service. Only those who share God's work of service can share God's life of gladness.

THE ACTION OF OUR LORD

He stood, and commanded him to be brought unto Him. Is that not what He is doing still? At every cry of human need the Divine Saviour commands that the sufferer shall be brought unto Him. So He sends His Church into all the world, that it may fulfil His command. We cannot save men, but we can bring them to Jesus Christ. And we dare not disobey His command.

Then, after the command, the question. Why ask a question to which the answer was so obvious? Was it to teach the disciples that it was the will

of God that men should put their need into words—that though “He knoweth our necessities before we ask,” He wants us to tell Him all our wants in the simple faith of children? Or was it a test of faith—“How much do you believe I can do for you?” It was not the only time that our Lord demanded a confession of need from those who came to Him for healing. For a consciousness of need is the only thing that we can bring to Him :

“Lord Jesus, I have naught to plead
In earth below or heaven above,
But just my own exceeding need,
And Thy exceeding love.”

That is the confession that we make every time we come to Holy Communion. So it is still true that, “He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich (those who have no consciousness of need) He hath sent empty away.” He meets us still with the same question—*What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?* It is a personal question, for every man has his own special need, and every man must realise it.

Then the gift. *Receive thy sight*—literally, “See again.” Almost all the miracles of Jesus were miracles of restoration. He came to give back to men their full faculties. For a blind man is something less than a full man—he lives in a world he cannot see. And all human life is blind—for all men live in a spiritual world which they cannot see till God has opened their eyes. And often they deny that there is any world there at all, and try to persuade themselves that what they cannot see does not exist. But when our eyes are opened—as S. Paul’s eyes were opened on the road to

Damascus, or as the young man's eyes were opened for whom Elisha prayed—then we see ; dimly at first, for our faith is weak, but more clearly as our faith grows stronger.

The first object on which the eyes of the blind man rested as sight came back must have been the face of Jesus Christ. He saw, and then he followed. All the Christian life is summed up in those two words—seeing and following—vision and service. Even if the way leads still, as the way led then, up to the agony of the cross, it is better to see and to suffer than to sit blind by the roadside while Jesus passes by and we are left behind.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

(S. Matthew iv. 1-11)

THE story of the Temptation must have been told to the disciples by Jesus Himself. Our Lord's baptism had probably brought to Him a clearer realisation of His mission, and the consciousness of possessing powers greater than human. How were these powers to be used, and how was that mission to be fulfilled? Was it to realise the answer to these questions that He was led into the wilderness?

The three temptations represent possibilities that were always present in the life of Jesus Christ. But when He had once faced and fought them, their power was gone. He made an irrevocable choice, and from that choice He never for a moment looked back.

Let us take the temptations in order. Like the

temptation in Gen. ii., they were all invitations to distrust God.

THE FIRST TEMPTATION

Here, as in the story in Genesis, bodily needs become the vehicle of temptation. "You are hungry; use your supernatural power to provide food." Why not? Because Jesus Christ would not work a miracle merely for His own benefit. He used His miraculous power always for others, never for Himself. All through His life it is true that "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." For when He "took upon Him human nature for its deliverance," He chose to be one with men in the experience of hunger and sorrow and need. To shrink from that sacrifice, even in a very little thing, would be an act of disloyalty to God and to the purpose of the Incarnation; and therefore a supreme triumph for evil. But the answer of Jesus was final. True human life has a deeper need than the need for bread; it needs communion with God, and communion can only come through obedience.

THE SECOND TEMPTATION

In S. Matthew's order, the next temptation is that in which Jesus Christ was transported in spirit to the great porch over the entrance of the Temple. It is probably correct to see in this temptation a suggestion that our Lord should claim the Messianic kingdom by descending miraculously into the court of the Temple. The kingdom was to be set up, not by winning men's hearts, but by awakening their wonder and superstition. And the temptation was more specious because it seemed

like an act of faith. But faith does not mean expecting God to carry out our plans, but depending on God for strength to carry out His plans. And His plan was to win men's love by the sacrifice of the cross, not to overawe them by a stupendous miracle.

THE THIRD TEMPTATION

Milton treats this temptation as an invitation to our Lord to establish His kingdom by taking up arms. It probably means more. It was an invitation to secure a right end by wrong means—just such a temptation as every great reformer has to face. So much to gain at the price of one act of homage to evil. But that one act would have made the whole victory valueless. For it was only a usurper's throne that the devil had to offer. No victory for Christ can ever be won by compromising with evil. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a wonderful study of how a man of fine character yields to the temptation to win a kingdom at the cost of honour. Over the whole story we might write the words of Jesus Christ, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

SOME GENERAL THOUGHTS

(1) Temptation is not sin. The higher a man's ideals are, the more he will be conscious of the possibility of letting them go. And it is only in resisting evil that we become conscious of its presence. It was the perfect holiness of Jesus Christ that made temptation real to Him.

(2) Times of spiritual uplifting are often followed by times of special temptation. The new

grace is followed by the new test. Never do we need more to "watch and pray" than just after special times of nearness to God.

It was just after Simon Peter had confessed "Thou art the Christ" that he tried to do what the devil did here—to discourage our Lord from the way of the cross.

(3) Temptation must be recognised and resisted immediately. Evil has won half the battle as soon as we stop to think. The man who is led by the Spirit of God acquires a kind of instinctive repulsion. "He cannot sin because he is born of God." But that divine sensitiveness to the lightest touch of evil is God's gift only to those who walk very closely with Him.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

(S. Matthew xv. 21-28)

LIKE so many other incidents in the ministry of Jesus Christ, this story of the woman of Canaan is a parable in action. Its lesson is "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Jesus and His disciples had been driven to the utmost northern border of the country by the hostility of the authorities—a fact that explains the anxiety of the disciples lest the woman's outcries might draw attention to them. Our Lord never, so far as we know, actually passed beyond the borders during His earthly ministry. For His mission was, first of all, to the Jews. It was only when they had rejected Him, and "gave a cross where they owed a throne," that He sent His disciples into all the

world to tell the story of that cross. Perhaps His apparent discouragement of the woman was partly due to the desire to avoid an inrush of demand from the great Gentile world. But there were two other reasons.

(1) He wanted to teach the disciples a lesson about prayer—to show them that real prayer was not an easy thing—that a man must learn, like Jacob, to take the kingdom of heaven by force, with the claim, “I will not let thee go except thou bless me.”

(2) He wanted to give the suppliant a twofold blessing—as when He said to the sick of the palsy first, “Thy sins be forgiven thee,” and then, “Arise and walk.” So here, it would have been easy to give the woman what she asked at once, but would she not have missed something through that ready response? Was not the discipline of wresting the gift from apparently reluctant hands a training of her spiritual character? Even so, we teach our children by compelling them to put forth effort, and we do not take hold of them till they are just ready to fall.

We must remember that our Lord knew that the woman was strong enough to stand the test. He wanted to call out the spiritual strength that He knew was there. It was because He loved men that He so often treated them in such a way as to call out the secret strength of their characters.

THREE STAGES

There are three stages in the story.

(1) *Silence*.—He met her prayer with apparent indifference. That is how God often seems to meet our prayers still. And sometimes we grow

discouraged and cease to pray. But if we are really in earnest we do not cease to pray, but, like the woman, we come nearer and worship Him. Nothing deepens human character more than perseverance in prayer. Many a man could bear testimony that his religion never became real to him till he began to pray for something he cared for supremely, and went on praying even when God seemed silent. For the real test of a man's belief in God is his perseverance in prayer.

(2) *Discouragement*.—The words are not as harsh in the original as they seem in English, for the word used is not the word for the hungry, savage dogs that roam the streets of Eastern villages, but the little pet dogs that live in the house, and sit by the table at meals. Still, it seemed a discouraging answer. What was its purpose? Was it not a reminder that humility and unselfishness must enter into our prayers? For prayer may be proud and self-complaisant, like the prayer of the Pharisee in the parable, who probably thought of the publican at the door as a dog only deserving of the crumbs from the table; or it may be selfish, as though our special need was the only need in all the world. So the words of Jesus were an invitation to the woman to say why she claimed His help. And how beautifully she responded to the opportunity! "The master does not grudge to the dogs the broken fragments from the table; there is food enough in the house for them, too. I do not ask that the children should go short that my need should be supplied; but there is enough to spare."

(3) *Commendation*.—How our Lord loved to meet with faith that was not baffled by apparent discouragement! He had so often to tell His

disciples that they were men of little faith, that His heart was glad when He could say to any who came to Him, "Great is thy faith." It must have been an ample reward for all the apparent discouragements to feel that He had been cheered by the fragrance of this wild flower gathered by the wayside. And then, when the suppliant had herself been blessed, the blessing took wings and flew to the sick bed from which she had come—"her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

How often, when we come to ask for some blessing for another, we go away with our own spiritual life strengthened and deepened. For it is when we remember the needs of others that we are entering into the mind of Christ.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

(S. Luke xi. 14-28)

THE opening verses tell us of two wrong views that were prevalent with regard to the miracles of Jesus Christ. There were people who regarded them as magic, and wanted to see greater wonders—"a sign from heaven"; and there were others, Pharisees from Jerusalem, who pretended to believe that His good deeds were done by the power of evil. (Notice how these two views correspond to the second and third temptations—"a sign from heaven"—"cast Thyself down"; "He casteth out demons through Beelzebub"—"fall down and worship me.")

The origin and meaning of the name Beelzebub

has never been satisfactorily explained, but it was evidently a familiar name for a supposed chief of evil spirits.

S. Luke does not record those sterner words in which our Lord warned the Pharisees that to impute good to the power of evil was to sin against the Holy Ghost. But he tells us of two simple arguments presented to the people by our Lord.

(1) *The argument from common sense.*—Is it reasonable to suppose that the powers of evil will fight against each other?

(2) *The argument from experience.*—Some Jews professed to be able to exorcise evil spirits. Were they also in league with evil?

THREE LESSONS

Then He told them of three lessons that they might learn from the casting out of the evil spirit.

(1) That the Kingdom of Heaven was near—close by them, though they did not realise it. (For the expression, “the finger of God,” see Exodus viii. 19. Perhaps our Lord was thinking of this incident.)

(2) That Jesus Christ was stronger than the powers of evil. There is a kind of peace that comes when a heart is wholly given to the service of sin, but when the stronger power of divine love begins to besiege that heart, there is contest till the “strong man” is driven out and the stronger comes in.

(3) A man cannot remain neutral in the great war. He must be on Christ’s side or against Him. The Pharisees found that out at last, and were obliged either to accept or to destroy Him.

THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT

The incident closes with the Parable of the Unclean Spirit. There are three special thoughts suggested by the story.

(1) Evil is impotent unless it can find some human life through which to act. It "wanders through waterless places seeking rest." Every temptation is the knock of some evil thing at the door of our hearts. Like the germs of disease it must get in before it can begin to poison our lives. Perhaps if our eyes were opened we should see throngs of evil spirits around every human soul, watching for a chance to steal in through some unguarded door.

(2) Evil comes back. We may think that we have conquered some bad habit or evil desire ; but we must remember that it will come back. And it is a terrible truth that sometimes a man who has conquered some evil thing in his nature, and then fallen back, seems far worse than before. His power of resistance seems broken. It is the solemn message of the Epistle to the Hebrews that a man who has once seen and welcomed the truth goes back into deeper darkness if he goes back at all. And the opening words of the "Athanasian Creed" are an attempt to teach the same truth—that to turn away from truth once known and accepted is to turn from life to death, from salvation to destruction.

(3) Negative virtue is no real safeguard. Even if we could turn evil out of our lives in our own strength, we cannot guard against its return. Our only safety is in filling our lives with good. If we love God with all our hearts, there is no love left for evil ; if the thoughts of our hearts are cleansed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, there is no room for evil spirits to enter in and dwell. The

ideal of the Christian life is not the absence of evil, but the presence of good.

DEMONIACAL POSSESSION

The whole question of possession by evil spirits is mysterious and difficult to understand. But certainly modern investigations in the region of psychology are a warning against the easy scepticism that a few years ago was inclined to regard the whole matter as a mere Jewish superstition. The mysteries of human personality are deeper than we have sometimes thought, and there is a good deal of evidence already that points to the possibility that human personalities may be influenced by disembodied personalities of a lower grade than themselves.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

(S. John vi. 1-14)

THIS is the only miracle of our Lord that is told in all four Gospels, and it is one of the very few occasions on which the author of the Fourth Gospel uses material already used by the synoptists. It is clear that S. John tells the story of the miracle in order to explain the teaching of our Lord about Himself as the Bread of Life. But it is very probable that the early Christians had already begun to associate the miracle with the Holy Communion service. For every Sunday a great multitude of Christian folk draws near in faith to be taught and fed; and every Sunday the men whom He has chosen for the office distribute to the people the

bread that He has blessed. And still there is enough for all.

The incident was a fourfold test of the disciples.

A TEST OF SYMPATHY

If they were to share His ministry to the people, they must first learn to share His feeling about the people. It is not enough to do as Jesus did, unless we first feel as Jesus felt. So His first challenge was, Do you care? The needs of the people are always a challenge; and love to Christ must show itself in love to men (*see* S. Matthew xxv. 31-46; 1 John iii. 17, &c.). The temptation to repudiate our responsibility—"send them away"—is still a real one.

A TEST OF FAITH

For Jesus Christ seemed to be asking an impossible thing. "The need is too big for us to meet." We are often tempted to give the same answer now, when we realise how much there is to do, and how inadequate our resources are. For, like the disciples, we forget that behind our efforts is the power of Christ.

A TEST OF ENERGY

Jesus invited the disciples to put forth effort. Notice how, throughout the whole story, He tried to associate them with Him. He wanted them to feel that He needed their co-operation. So His question was "Whence shall *we* buy bread?" He would not take the responsibility out of their hands. They must bring what they could; they must arrange the people in orderly ranks (like flower-beds as S. Mark tells us); and they must distribute the bread to the people. They were not

to be mere spectators, but fellow-workers with Him—men on whom He could depend.

God has chosen to make the extension of His Kingdom depend on human effort. So a lad offers his little store of bread and fish ; and human organisation brings the food to the people. But the gift must pass under the consecration of the hands of Christ. It is only when we bring our resources first to Him that He makes them enough for the need. Worship and service—the offering of our lives to God and the use of our lives for humanity, must go together.

A TEST OF REVERENCE

It was as an act of reverence that He told them to gather up the broken pieces that remained? They were only broken fragments, but He had blessed them ; and nothing that He had blessed must be wasted. What the people had thrown on one side was still of value to Him.

It is so still. There are broken fragments of human lives that we are sometimes tempted to think of no value, but His command is “Go and gather them up.” They are the fragments of lives that He blessed long ago ; they must not be wasted. The miracle might have made the disciples careless. They might have thought that they could depend on the miraculous power of Jesus to supply their needs, and so have neglected ordinary human forethought. By ordering them to gather up the fragments, so that each man filled his satchel with bread, He taught them that they must not depend on Him to do what they ought to do for themselves. The general lesson of the command is that God is the enemy of waste. He cares for the one sheep as

well as the ninety and nine ; He cares for the broken fragments as well as for the five loaves. To the Infinite Mind nothing is insignificant.

It is impossible to explain how the miracle was done ; but it is worth noting that every year the same miracle is wrought in the world of nature, when a handful of corn is multiplied many times by the mysterious power of life. If for one year the harvest failed, the whole human race would probably perish. It is only because of its familiarity that the yearly miracle of the harvest fails to fill us with wonder, as this miracle filled the men who saw it

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

(S. John viii. 46-59)

OUR Lord would not allow men to remain indifferent to His claims. As He drew nearer to the end of His earthly life, He pressed on them more and more persistently the alternative of recognising or rejecting His authority. S. John brings out this fact more clearly than the other evangelists. We see how the teaching of Jesus Christ centred more and more in Himself, and how the Jewish leaders came to see that they must either accept or destroy Him. The discourse of which the latter part forms the Gospel for this week was one of the critical stages in this process. It was a declaration of war on the attitude of mere toleration. In these verses there is a challenge, a claim, and a contrast.

A CHALLENGE

“ If I am wrong, prove it ; if I am right, confess

it." That is the permanent alternative that is still presented to men. It is what Dr. Liddon called "the great dilemma." We cannot admit part of His claim, and deny the rest. A good man does not preach about himself, as Jesus Christ did. If He were only a man, He was not a good man. Only God could speak about Himself, as our Lord spoke about Himself.

But the appeal is a moral appeal. The more our lives are in harmony with God, the more they will respond to the claim of Christ. The man who is "not of God"—that is, whose soul does not aspire towards God, will be deaf to the appeal of Christ. Or, to put the same thought more simply, it is only moral aspiration that ever leads us to the truth. It is the "honest and good heart" that receives the seed of the Word. It was the final condemnation of the Pharisees that they *did not want* to recognise the truth, because it would mean confessing that their whole lives were wrong. It was pride that hid the truth from them. They would not "become as little children," and so the Kingdom of Heaven was closed to them.

A CLAIM

"If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death." The word for "see" here means, according to Westcott, "long, steady, exhaustive vision, whereby we become slowly acquainted with the nature of the object to which it is directed." The Christian sees death only as a passing thing, through which he goes, not as a permanent state in which he dwells.

The word for "keep" here implies "intense

watching." So we may paraphrase the words: "The man whose gaze is fixed intently on My teaching will pass death without noticing it." Why? Because his eyes are fixed on eternal things. He looks beyond death. Could any such claim as this be made by any merely human lips? Yet eighteen centuries have proved it true. Men have faced death courageously, and even gladly, at all ages of history; but Jesus Christ alone taught men the impotence of death. For the life of union with God that He offered to men is above the reach of death.

A CONTRAST

After telling them that His claim does not rest on mere personal ambition, but on God's verdict, He closes the discussion with a tremendous assertion. "Before Abraham was, I am." It is not merely a claim to be older than the founder of the Jewish race; it is a claim to be outside time altogether. Some have thought that the words "I am" refer to the name of God in Exod. iii. 14, and really mean, "I am One with the Being to Whom the name 'I am' was given." This is not certain; but it is clear that the Jews regarded the words as practically a claim to be Divine, for they resolved to inflict the punishment of stoning, which was the penalty of blasphemy (*see* Lev. xxiv. 16, S. John x. 31, xix. 7).

"Jesus hid Himself." The words do not imply a miracle. (The last words, "going through," etc., are not part of the original text.) When the appointed time had come, Jesus did not hide Himself, but met the crowd calmly face to face. But till then His life was not His own to sacrifice.

So long as there was still the possibility of winning the allegiance of the Jewish leaders, He continued to reason and appeal. Only when they had irrevocably decided to destroy Him did He face the final struggle. It is still true that Jesus Christ will never leave a man till the man has determined to leave Him. If He seems to hide Himself, it is only that He may renew His appeal. But the appeal is always to the moral nature ; His army is an army of volunteers, His bondservants are freemen. If a man is deaf to the moral appeal of Christ, there is no other appeal possible. To reject Christ is to choose the lower rather than the higher ; self, rather than God.

SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE EASTER

(S. Matthew xxvii)

LET us take one special thought from the story of the death of Jesus Christ—the motives that led men to reject Him.

JUDAS

His motive was *greed*. He loved Jesus (his action after His condemnation showed that), but he loved money more—or, at least, he thought that he did, till he discovered too late the value of what he had lost and the valuelessness of what he had gained. Covetousness has led many men since then to betray Christ to His enemies.

PILATE

His special danger was *desire for popularity*. He wanted to save Jesus, but not at the cost of

offending the people. So he tried to evade the responsibility of deciding, to throw it on Herod, or on the people. And yet how valueless the temporary popularity that he purchased at so tremendous a price. A man who wants to be faithful to Jesus Christ must be prepared to take the unpopular side, whatever the cost. It seems hard at the moment, but in the long run what does popularity matter compared with the commendation of Christ?

THE PHARISEES

It was *envy*—jealousy for their own position—that led the rulers of the Jews to determine to get rid of Jesus Christ. They wanted undisturbed control; they resented His claim to authority. They thought that His death would leave them in unchallenged supremacy. How often men have tried to get rid of Jesus Christ from the same motive. If we can banish Him out of our lives, they say, we can be our own masters—we can go our own way without interference.

THE ROMAN SOLDIERS

They were merely *callous* and *brutal*. It was surely these especially of whom He was thinking when He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." So they represent all the thoughtless cruelty of the world. For all thoughtless cruelty is crucifying Christ. Wherever the strong use their strength to oppress the weak; wherever the claim of goodness is met with the mocking jeer or the scornful taunt—there He still suffers in the suffering of His little ones.

THE PEOPLE

Their rejection was the hardest of all to bear, for He had loved them and served them and blessed them. But they had the offer of Christ or Barabbas, and they chose Barabbas. Why? Because they had a false idea of what constituted true greatness. It was force against patience, mere animal courage against moral courage. Men still reject Jesus Christ for the same reason. The man who says that "God is on the side of the big battalions," who ignores the moral forces of the world, is choosing Barabbas rather than Christ. The man who likes to be on the winning side, to shout with the biggest crowd, is choosing Barabbas rather than Christ.

So the death of Jesus Christ brought all these lives to the test—it challenged them all to say what they cared for most. Judas answered, money; Pilate answered, popularity; the Pharisees answered, power; the Roman soldiers answered, ribald cruelty; and the people answered, Barabbas the robber.

Every Holy Week the same question comes to us all. For the Cross stands for the true ideal of life—not covetousness but sacrifice, not popularity but faithfulness, not power but obedience, not cruelty but gentleness, not brute strength but patient goodness. It is never easy to take the side of Jesus Christ against the world—to be like S. John, who stood by the Cross, or Simon who bore it, or the thief who confessed the Crucified as his Lord, or even the rough soldier who was moved with pity and held up the sponge with vinegar to the dying lips of Christ. Yet looking back over that scene,

are not these the men we should choose to be? To be on Christ's side often means that a man must take the unpopular side, but honour and loyalty call us to stand there. It is only through the fellowship of His sufferings that we pass to the glory of His Resurrection.

EASTER DAY

(S. John xx. 1-10)

THE fact of the resurrection of the Lord did not break suddenly on the disciples. They were allowed to realise it gradually; it was not till the evening of the day that He came to them. By that time they had heard of the empty tomb and the vision of angels, and had had time to recollect words of Christ that now began to have a new meaning. So they met Him, not with frenzied excitement, but with calm recognition and gladness.

The Gospel tells us of the first stage in this process of gradual realisation. It shows us three things.

I.—It shows how little even those who were nearest to Him had expected any such event as a resurrection. The only thing that the empty tomb suggested to Mary was that someone had removed the body, and when the two apostles ran to the sepulchre they only came to look for a dead Christ. They were not in the least degree in the mood to be deceived by beautiful illusions. If Jesus had appeared to them on the way they would probably have failed to recognise Him, as the other two did on the same afternoon, or as Mary did, in the garden, till Jesus spoke her name.

II.—The evidence came through a simple, almost a commonplace, fact. First, S. John, peering into the tomb, saw that the grave-clothes were still there. The body could not have been removed by any of the disciples, who would never have dreamed of disrobing it. Then S. Peter went in, and saw more. The grave-clothes were lying on the shelf, and the head-cloth, so Dr. Latham thinks, just where the head had been, as though the body had passed through its wrappings. At least, there were no signs of haste or disorder; no evidence of hostile hands. It was not a vision, or a recollection of Old Testament prophecies, that first awakened the disciples' hope; it was a mere physical fact—the orderly condition of the tomb. How often the wonderful things of life are associated with just such simple facts. At great moments, the most ordinary things become charged with infinite significance—like the bush in the desert that Moses saw. And faith is the faculty of our nature that can interpret the spiritual meaning of common things.

III.—The truth of the resurrection was revealed to men who were willing to put forth effort. “They ran both together.” Both men were true to their character—John's eager love outran his colleague, while Peter's bolder impetuosity carried him past the entrance, where the other apostle halted, into the tomb itself. Verse 8 seems to suggest that it was S. John who first realised what it all meant. “He saw and believed.” He was therefore able to help his brother apostle to understand, and to be ready when, a few hours later, Jesus Himself “appeared unto Simon.”

IV.—What did the empty tomb signify? At

the resurrection our Lord resumed a real human life. But a real human life is not the life of a disembodied spirit. If the body of our Lord had remained in the grave the disciples might have thought that the ghost of their Master had appeared to them—but they would not have felt that a human life had triumphed over death. We know too little of the laws of the spiritual world to be able to understand the change that passed over the body in the few short hours that it rested in the tomb. We are only beginning to understand how much the physical world is under the control of the spirit. In the life of Jesus Christ that control was complete. In the garden of Gethsemane the physical nature made its last protest, but the supremacy of the spirit remained complete. So the Cross was “the offering of the body of Christ”—its final and irrevocable surrender to the will of God.

V.—“The disciples went away again to their own home.” They had discovered a tremendous fact—a fact the full meaning of which they only imperfectly understood. Was not their quiet return home a great act of faith—an evidence of their confidence that He would make all things plain in His own time? And before that Easter Day was over “He was seen of Cephas, then of the Twelve,” and they had passed from the empty tomb to the living Lord.

So the first message of that Easter Day was “He is not here”; and the final message was “He is here,” in the midst of His disciples in the upper room—in the midst of His Church for ever.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

(S. John xx. 19-23)

THE gathering on that first Easter evening (perhaps in the same upper room where the Last Supper had been held three days before), included others besides the Apostles (*see* S. Luke xxiv. 33). It would take too long to draw out all the significance of this first appearance of Jesus Christ to His Church; let us, therefore, confine our attention to the closing verses. They constitute our Lord's three-fold charge to His Church.

A NEW COMMISSION

Two different Greek words for "sent" are used in this verse. The first is the word from which "apostle" is derived. It means "commissioned," "sent forth" for some special purpose; the other is the usual word for sending. Our Lord was not transferring to the disciples the commission that the Father had given Him, He was calling them to share it. He did not cease to be the Saviour of the world after the resurrection; but He sent His Church to carry on the work, with the assurance of His presence (*see* S. Matthew xxviii. 20). The Church is not the successor of a Christ who has departed, but the agent of a Christ who is present.

Again, there is a difference of tense. The first "sent" is in the perfect tense. The Father sent forth His Son *once for all*. But the second "sent" is in the present tense, for Jesus Christ is always sending out His disciples. Every day the charge is renewed, "Go, work to-day in My vineyard."

A NEW POWER

He breathed on them (*compare* Gen. ii. 7. Natural and supernatural life are both "the breath of God"). The act expressed the gift to them of the same Divine life by which He lived. They could not fulfil His commission unless they were endowed with His Spirit. But they were not to be mere passive instruments. They were to *take* what He gave. Was that why He gave them the commission first, then the power? For the first thought that would arise in their minds when they were called to share His work would naturally be, "How can we, who only two days ago forsook Him and fled, ever dare to hope that we can fulfil so great a responsibility?" So His next word and act were an assurance that the power would be there to meet the need. It was the Spirit of *prevenient* grace that He gave them then; the Spirit of *co-operating* grace came on the day of Pentecost (*see* Article x. of the Thirty-nine Articles, for the distinction; also Collects for First Sunday after Epiphany, Easter Day, Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity).

A NEW AUTHORITY

It was an authority given to the whole Church collectively. In commissioning her ministers the Church hands on to them the authority she has received from her Master (*see* the Ordination service). And what is that authority? It is worth noting that "whosoever" here is plural—that is, it refers primarily to groups or classes of people. It means that the Church is charged to interpret the moral law of Christ under the changing

circumstances of human life, to declare the conditions of the Divine forgiveness. But the application of those conditions to the individual is certainly included within the scope of the words.

But does this mean that the Church is always right? Yes, in so far as she acts under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For the three verses hold together—they are all part of one fact. First, there is the fellowship that comes through unity in service. Jesus Christ and His “soldiers and servants” are all *doing the same thing*. Then there is the fellowship that comes through unity in life—Jesus Christ and His “soldiers and servants” are all *living by the same power*, the power of the Divine Spirit, that flows, like the sap in the vine, from the head to the members. Then there is the fellowship that comes from unity of moral consciousness. Jesus Christ and His “soldiers and servants” are all *proclaiming the same truth*. First, do the will of God; then, share the life of God; then, know the mind of God.

If Pentecost was the *baptism* of the Church, this evening in the upper room was the *birthday* of the Church. It was there that the disciples realised that they were to be an organised society, sharing a common work, dependent on one Spirit, and declaring one law of divine forgiveness.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

(S. John x. 11-16)

(This passage should be studied in the Revised Version, where the translation is more accurate than in the Authorised Version.)

IT is noticeable that while the Synoptists report our Lord's teaching in the form of parables, S. John gives it in the form of allegories. Compare, for example, the parable of the lost sheep with this discourse.

In the earlier part of the chapter the contrast is between the shepherd and the thief. But in verse 11 our Lord turns to another contrast—between the shepherd (who is the owner of the sheep) and the hireling. The whole point of the contrast lies in the fact that the hireling has no personal affection for the sheep, and therefore (*a*) does not risk his life for them, (*b*) does not know them, (*c*) does not gather them.

(1) The idea of God as the shepherd of Israel was familiar in the Old Testament. It conveyed the idea of protection and guidance. Our Lord added a deeper thought—that of sacrifice. None of the prophets had dared to think of God as giving His life for the people. Notice, in this connection, the special word used here for “good.” It is not *agathos*, “good in itself,” but *kalos*, “shown to be good,” and so often meaning “beautiful.” The good shepherd shows his goodness by giving his life for the sheep. To the question, How do we know that God is good? the final answer is, the Cross. The good shepherd values the life of his sheep more than his own, because they are helpless and dependent, and cannot defend themselves. It is the supreme law of the kingdom that the strong must serve the weak; it is the final condemnation of the faithless shepherd that he feeds himself and not the flock (Ezek. xxxiv. 2).

(2) The sympathy between sheep and shepherd. It is so deep and intimate that it is like the union

of the Father with the Son (compare vi. 57 ; xiv. 20 ; xv. 10). So the hireling drives his sheep, while the shepherd leads them. The only influence that Jesus Christ would use was the influence of love. Force had no place in His kingdom (xviii. 36). When He speaks of the "other sheep," He says, "Them also I must lead" (not "bring"). The Son knows the Father through *identity of nature*, so the Christian knows his Lord through identity of nature—because the Spirit of Christ is dwelling in him (xv. 26 ; xvii. 23). And the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of sacrifice—"I lay down My life for the sheep." We cannot know Christ till we catch His spirit of sacrifice (*see* 1 S. John iii. 16).

(3) The gathering of the flock. The purpose of the wolf is to destroy and scatter ; the purpose of the shepherd to save and to gather. The "other sheep not of this fold," conveys the idea of scattered sheep, undefended and unsheltered (*see* xi. 52 ; S. Matthew ix. 36). "Them also I must lead," or, to give the full force of the word, "over them also I must claim the right of leadership." The mis-translation of the words that follow has done much harm. It is not one fold but one *flock*—that is, they are to become one not merely because they are sheltered in one place, but because they are subject to one leadership. They are one flock because they have one shepherd (the reference is, of course, to Ezek. xxxiv. 23). We must not miss the significance of "must." It is the Divine purpose that all the scattered sheep shall be gathered. The mission work of the Church is the very ground of its existence. The "must" of Jesus is a challenge.

Notice, in conclusion, how this picture of the sheep and shepherd brings out the personal and

collective relation of men to Jesus Christ. Every sheep is known to the shepherd, separately and individually, not one shall be lost. But they are a flock, a community that lives and acts together, not each going its own way, but obeying a common governance. So the wolf (the spirit of evil) seeks not only to destroy individuals but also to scatter the community—to break up the unity of the Christian society.

SEVEN ASPECTS OF THE SHEPHERD

The good shepherd, S. John x. 14; the great shepherd, Heb. xiii. 20; the chief shepherd, 1 Pet. v. 4; the patient shepherd, S. Matthew xviii. 12; the gentle shepherd, Isa. xl. 11; the one shepherd, S. John x. 16; My shepherd, Psal. xxiii. 1.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

(S. John xvi. 16-22)

OUR Lord's method of teaching was often to propound a saying that seemed almost a contradiction (compare S. Matthew x. 39; S. Luke xiv. 26; S. Mark x. 31, &c.), and leave time for His disciples to puzzle over it. Like all true teachers, the Great Teacher knew that the value of truth is often proportional to the effort required to understand it. Truths easily learned are easily forgotten. He wanted to rouse in men the spirit of inquiry—to make them "desirous to ask Him." And sometimes, as in this case, the answer did not become clear till it was explained by after-events ("Thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter").

There is a threefold contrast in this passage.

A CONTRAST BETWEEN SIGHT AND VISION

The word "see" is represented by two different Greek words, "Ye behold Me not—ye shall see Me." The difference is between sight and insight. It was not that in a little while they would return to their former condition, but that they should be lifted into a higher vision. The reference is not so much to the appearances of Jesus Christ after the resurrection, but rather to the permanent insight by which the Church discerns her Lord, passing at last into the full vision of heaven (1 Cor. xiii. 12; 1 S. John iii. 2). The external vision must be lost for a little while that the internal vision may be gained. The Holy Spirit came to reveal Christ. So we pray :

"Enable with perpetual light
The dulness of our blinded sight."

A CONTRAST BETWEEN SORROW AND JOY

Here again the thought is not the restoration of a lost joy, but the progress through sorrow to a new joy. The joy of a mother over her new-born child is the joy of a new achievement won through suffering. S. Paul speaks of the whole creation as "groaning and travailing in pain" (Rom. viii. 22). The sufferings of the world are the birth-pangs of the Kingdom of God (S. Mark xiii. 8). And, for the Christian, the pangs of death are the birth-pangs of the new life. Was S. Peter thinking of these words of Jesus when he wrote the opening verses of his Epistle (*see* 1 Pet. i. 6, 8)? But the sharing of the sorrow of Christ is the necessary condition of sharing

His joy (1 Pet. iv. 13 ; Rom. viii. 17 ; Phil. iii. 10). The world that rejoices at His death can find no joy in His resurrection. The secret of Christian joy is sympathy with the purpose of Christ. So "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (see Heb. xii. 2). The "little while" between the Ascension and Pentecost was not a little while of sorrow, for the disciples knew that the future was sure, since He had "entered into His glory." (S. Luke xxiv. 26, 32).

A CONTRAST BETWEEN THE TEMPORAL AND THE ETERNAL

"The things that are seen (with the outward eye) are temporal." External forms of worship, "outward and visible signs," have their day and cease to be. It is the inward eye that sees the eternal. And the sorrow, too, is only for a little while ; the joy "no man taketh from you." It is an eternal possession. And since man lives in both worlds, sorrow and joy both belong to his life. He is "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing"—2 Cor. vi. 10 (compare 1 Pet. i. 6). But the sorrow belongs to a world that is passing away, while the joy belongs to a world that is eternal.

But if joy is to be eternal, it must be fixed on eternal things. (Col. iii. 1.) The resurrection of Jesus Christ fixed the centre of gravity of the disciples' lives in the eternal world, where Jesus Christ was. Hence, no man could take their joy from them, since no man could take Jesus Christ from them.

“ Life, I repeat, is energy of love,
 Divine or human ; exercised in pain,
 In strife and tribulations ; and ordained,
 If so approved, and sanctified, to pass
 Through shades, and silent rest, to endless joy.”

A PRACTICAL LESSON

The secret of a true understanding of life is to look further ahead. For the disciples the immediate future was to be unrelieved sorrow. The secret of endurance was in looking beyond with the eye of faith. “ Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

(S. John xvi. 5-15)

IN these verses Jesus Christ tells His disciples about three aspects of the work of the *Paraclete* (“ He who may be called to our help ”). Notice that the Christian has two Paracletes. Jesus Christ is our Paraclete in heaven (1 S. John ii. 1) and the Holy Spirit is our Paraclete on earth.

He told them first of :

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE WORLD

There were three directions in which the death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord have changed human standards of value. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring home these new standards to the consciences of men.

(a) *Sin*.—Sin is ultimately a failure to respond to good. And therefore, wherever the story of Jesus Christ is known, it is the failure to respond to the

challenge of that life (xii. 19; xii. 32). Not to "believe in" Him means turning from a higher ideal to a lower one. The only ultimate failure is the refusal to reach up towards the highest.

(b) *Righteousness*.—The ascension of Jesus Christ ("because I go to the Father") carried the divine ideal of righteousness, that He had manifested in a human life, into the realm of eternal things. Henceforth righteousness means union with the risen life of Christ. It has to do with what we *are*, rather than with what we *do*.

(c) *Judgment*.—The resurrection was the guarantee of the final victory of good. The powers of evil had put forth their supreme effort, and had failed. Henceforth the man who fights for sin is fighting on the losing side. The doom of evil is sure. "The ruler of this world hath been judged." So there are three things that come home to a man's conscience when he listens to the voice of the Holy Spirit:—You are not responding as you ought to do to the divine ideal—there is a divine ideal to which you ought to respond—all that does not respond to the divine ideal must perish.

Then He told them of :

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH

His work of revelation is :

(a) *Progressive*.—"He shall guide"—stage by stage, by a gradual process, as we are willing to follow (Isa. xxviii. 16). So He led the disciples into a gradually enlarging realisation of the truth. So He leads men still. The man who thinks that he knows all the truth misses the real way to truth,

because he has lost the childlike spirit that is always eager to learn (Phil. iii. 12 ; 1 Pet. ii. 2).

(b) *Perfect*.—Prophets and teachers see a little further than other men into the mind of God ; but only the Holy Spirit knows the whole mind of the Father (1 Cor. ii. 11). So the emphatic word is “whatsoever.” He shall not speak by His own authority, as though He were an independent revealer of truth ; He is at once the ear and the voice of God—the ear that hears all the divine counsels, and the voice that repeats them to man.

(c) *Preparatory*.—“He shall declare to you the coming things.” God is always thinking about the future ; and the Church that is following the guidance of the Spirit will not be absorbed in the things of the present, but will move forward, claiming to-morrow for Christ. If we lose this forward look, we lose the real strength of the Christian life. The Christian is always watching for the morning (1 Thess. v. 5). Was not this the truth that underlay all that Jesus Christ said to His disciples about His “appearing”—his *parousia* ? He was training them to look forward.

“The triple repetition of the phrase, ‘He will declare to you,’ at the end of the three verses 13, 14, 15, gives a solemn emphasis to it” (Westcott).

Lastly, He told them of ;

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BEING OF GOD

He lifted for a moment the veil that hides the mysterious depths of the divine nature. The Holy Spirit glorified the Son, as the Son glorified the Father (xiv. 26 ; xvii. 4). The self-revelation of God is expressed in the three-foldness of the divine nature. We see the Godhead of the Son in the light

of the revelation of the Holy Spirit ; we see the Godhead of the Father in the light of the revelation of the Son. And as the whole Being of the Father—"All that the Father hath"—belongs to the Son, so the whole Being of the Son is ministered to us through the Spirit. So there is the Father, who gives (the love of God) ; the Son who brings (the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ) ; the Spirit, who communicates (the fellowship of the Holy Ghost)—and these Three are One.

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION DAY

(S. John xv. 26-xvi. 4)

THE keyword of this passage is the idea of witness. How was the truth of the life of Jesus Christ to be kept alive in the world, when He was no longer visibly present ? By a twofold testimony—the testimony of history and the testimony of experience.

THE WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus Christ tells us two things about the mission of the Holy Spirit. (1) He is not an independent revelation of the Divine ; He is the messenger of the Son. (2) Yet He is not a kind of third in descent within the Godhead ; His relation with the Father is direct. "He proceedeth from the Father's side." (Notice that this verse does not bear directly on the question of the "eternal procession" that divided the Eastern and Western Churches. Our Lord is speaking of the Holy Spirit here as coming into the world—in theological language, it is the "economic" not the

“immanent” aspect of the Holy Trinity that is here in view.) The witness of the Holy Spirit is given in the facts of history. The actual history of the Church is the record of the activity of the Holy Spirit, keeping alive in the world the influence of the Christian ideal. The existence of Christianity is itself a supernatural fact. Like the fire in the Interpreter’s house in “Pilgrim’s Progress,” it cannot be quenched because it is fed with oil from the other side.

THE WITNESS OF THE DISCIPLES

The testimony of history must be followed by the testimony of experience. It was the qualification for an apostle that he should be able to testify from personal experience (*see* Acts i. 21). Dr. Latham in *Pastor Pastorum* calls attention to the fact that the disciples were especially well suited for the work of being witnesses. “Had they been imaginative, had they been enthusiasts, this would have been a bar to the accepting of their evidence; but the Apostles were singularly literal-minded men. We see no exaggeration in them, no wild fervour, nothing that belongs to the religious fanatic.”

The Apostles were to tell what they knew; their business was not theories or arguments, but the testimony of experience. And it is still true that the testimony of experience is our great need.

But experience must harmonise with history—the individual life must link on to the life of the whole society. Every man’s religion is his own personal possession, yet every man’s religion is part of a great whole, that goes back in unbroken succession to the first beginning of Christianity.

THE NATURE OF THE WITNESS

The word "martyr," which originally meant "one who bears witness to the truth," came to mean "one who suffers for the truth." These verses show the transition. Jesus Christ warns his disciples that to be a martyr in the first sense will mean martyrdom in the second sense also. So He told them, firstly, of the *certainty* of persecution. It would mean not only ex-communication, but death. The word used for service here, means ritual service. Meyer quote a rabbinic saying, "Every man who pours out the blood of the wicked is equal to him who offers a sacrifice." The motive for persecution is generally religious—therein lies the tragedy of history (see Acts xxvi. 9; 1 Tim. i. 13).

Then He told them of the *reason* of persecution. "Because they know not." The disciples were to learn to meet hatred with compassion. In order that they might "pray for them that persecute" them, they were reminded that all this hatred and violence grew out of ignorance of God.

And, lastly, He told them of the *secret of endurance* in persecution. They were to remember, then, that He knew it all. Just as the words that He had spoken to them about His own sufferings came back to them after the resurrection (S. John xiv. 26; S. Luke xxiv. 8), so His words about their sufferings would come back to them in the dungeon or in the arena, and give them strength to endure.

The final thought of the passage is the *responsibility of discipleship*. Jesus Christ entrusted the future of His cause to the Holy Spirit and the disciples. If they depended on the Holy Spirit, it was not less true that the Holy Spirit depended on

them. If they were unfaithful, His witness was weakened by the lack of theirs. For an example of the co-operation of the divine and human witness see Acts xv. 28. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us."

WHITSUNDAY

(S. John xiv. 15-31)

AS we cannot deal with the whole of this passage, let us consider the teaching of our Lord on the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, in verses 16, 17, 26.

THE NAME

The word Paraclete means "one who is called to the side of another," so a champion or an advocate. We can see what it means here if we realise how Jesus Christ had taught His disciples to depend on Him for protection, guidance, and all else that they needed. He could always be "called to their help." So when He spoke of leaving them they must have felt that they would be helpless. His answer was, "The Father will give you (not merely send, but, as it were, make your own) another helper able to do all that I have done for you, and able to remain permanently with you."

The passive form of the word implies that He will be with us in proportion as we depend on Him. He will come *when we call*.

THE NATURE OF THE PRESENCE

The words here suggest three degrees of intimacy. (1) He will be with you, as a companion sharing the

same road. (2) He stays beside you, as a friend sharing the same purpose. (3) He shall be in you, as an inner Presence acting not from without but from within.

But the Presence is conditioned by moral sympathy. So in verse 15, "If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments, and I will pray," &c. First love; then obedience; then fellowship. There can be no true fellowship except through obedience; there can be no true obedience except through love.

So the world cannot receive the Holy Spirit, because it "seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him." There are two avenues of knowledge—outward sight and inward perception. The Holy Spirit is not visible to outward sight (*see* 2 Cor. iv. 18), and can be known only through moral sympathy. And it is exactly the lack of this moral sympathy that makes human society "the world" in S. John's sense. Or perhaps we may take the word "see" in a rather different sense. Then the three words "see," "know," "receive," represent three stages in the human response to the call of the Spirit. First, we see, that is, we recognise the fact of the existence of the Holy Spirit; then we know, that is, we recognise that the Holy Spirit is God's gift to *us*; then we receive, that is, we open our lives to the incoming of the Divine Guest.

(Does not our preparation for Confirmation pass through these three stages—the historical fact, the spiritual significance, the personal application?)

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

"In My Name" here means more than "as My representative." Compare v. 43, &c., where our Lord claims to come in His Father's name—that is.

as the revealer of His Father's character. So the Holy Spirit is the revealer of the character of the Son. And His office is twofold :

(1) *He shall teach.*—The work of the teacher is to bring the minds of his pupils in contact with truth. The truth is there already, but they have to make it their own. So the Holy Spirit did not come to bring a new revelation, to add to what Christ Jesus had already showed to men of the nature of God. Jesus Christ has revealed to men all that our human faculties are able to understand of the nature of God ; it is the work of the Holy Spirit to give to that revelation its full meaning. Sometimes, as in the case of the Montanists of the second century, men have forgotten this, and thought of the Holy Spirit as bringing fresh truths to men. The whole truth is there already, in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ—only we do not see its full meaning till the Holy Spirit “ takes of the things of Christ and reveals them unto us.”

(2) *He shall remind.*—If one of our dangers is ignorance, another is forgetfulness. As the mind must be taught to understand, so the conscience must be taught to remember. And the Holy Spirit is the educator of the conscience. His is the “ still, small voice ”

“ That checks each fault, that calms each fear,
And speaks of heaven.”

So Truth and Holiness are the special characteristics of the Divine Spirit. He is the Spirit of Truth because He teaches the human mind to *know* rightly ; He is the Holy Spirit because He teaches the human heart to remember and so to *do* rightly.

TRINITY SUNDAY

(S. John iii. 1-15)

OUR Lord's conversation with Nicodemus is the only explanation of the Gospel given by Jesus Christ to a religious leader. Nicodemus was a teacher of theology, and so our Lord tells him that the great truth about Christian theology is that it requires a certain attitude of mind and heart. It cannot be fully understood from outside. A man must be born into the spiritual world before he can understand its mysteries.

There are two worlds—the world of “the flesh” and the world of “the spirit”—and each has its own truths. A man is born into the natural world, and learns to understand its laws by experience; so a man must be “born from above” before he can know the laws of the spiritual world. It was not a new knowledge that is his first need, but a new life.

There are two great truths about this new life.

IT IS REALISED THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

The word for wind or breath is the same in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin as the word for spirit. The air which surrounds our physical selves and sustains our lives is like the Spirit that surrounds our spiritual selves (“In Him we live and move and are”): so the activity of the air that we call the wind corresponds to the activity of the Holy Spirit. We know both by experience, not by theory. And both are mysterious. They come, we know not whence; they go, we know not whither; only as

they touch our human lives we know them. Christian theology is an attempt to put into words the experience of Christian lives. So the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is the attempt of the Church to put into words what men *felt* about God. His love is always above us ; His grace is always coming down to us ; His fellowship is always with us.

IT IS REVEALED BY THE SON

No one can tell us about heavenly things unless he knows them, and no one can know them unless he has been there. No man has ascended up to Heaven and come back to tell us about "heavenly things." But One has come down from heaven to reveal its meaning to us. (The words "who is in heaven" are probably an early addition to the text, but the same thought appears in i. 18.)

But the Son of Man came not only to reveal but to redeem ; not only to tell men about heaven but to lift them up to heaven. So He was "lifted up" on the cross that He might be lifted up on the throne (Phil. ii. 9 ; Eph. iv. 9). When Moses lifted up the serpent, the cure was *of the same kind* as the evil ; so Jesus Christ came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. viii. 3).

GOD'S THREEFOLD GIFT

(a) *Revelation*. The Father, Who is in heaven, reveals Himself through the Incarnation. Jesus Christ came to reveal God (S. John i. 18, &c.).

(b) *Redemption*. The Son of God, Who came down from heaven, became Son of Man that He might restore all the sons of men to the Father's house.

(c) *Realisation*. The Holy Spirit, Who unites

earth and heaven, stirs the spiritual life into consciousness, as the wind stirs the trees ("thou hearest the sound thereof").

So the threefold gift points to a Threefold Giver. What we mean by the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is that the three ways in which God has revealed Himself to us correspond to eternal realities within the mystery of the divine Being. We believe in a life above us, infinite and eternal, the ultimate source of all life; we believe in a human life lifted up once on the cross, a life like and yet unlike our own; we believe in a life within our own, moving in the depths of our being, a wind that blows through the secret chambers of the soul, stirring into activity the dormant good that lies deep down in human hearts. And we believe that these are all one life—the life of the One God.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Luke xvi. 19-31)

THE parable was spoken to the Pharisees—that is, to men who (unlike the Sadducees) professed to believe in a future life. It was a challenge to them to ask themselves whether their lives corresponded to their belief. To use a favourite phrase of German theology, it is "a study in relative standards of value."

In trying to understand the parable, we must distinguish between its permanent lessons and its Jewish setting. Our Lord took the existing Jewish ideas of the hereafter—Paradise or "Abraham's bosom" and "Sheol" or Hades—as the

framework of the story. He would not have thus used them if they did not correspond to some reality of the eternal world ; but we need to remember we are dealing with the language of figure and allegory.

The story gives us three pictures.

TWO HUMAN LIVES LOOKED AT ENTIRELY FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE TEMPORAL WORLD

They show us how inexplicable the inequalities of human life appear if we leave out of account all the life beyond. Dives and Lazarus show how our Lord realised the problem of the apparent injustice of things here on earth. If there is not another life, human inequalities are an insoluble enigma. Dives is not presented as a bad man—but simply as a man who enjoys the good of the moment with no regard to the future (*compare* S. Luke xii. 16-21). Our Lord's constant warning against the danger of riches is illustrated by the parable. And Lazarus illustrates the corresponding benediction of poverty.

THE SAME TWO LIVES LOOKED AT FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE ETERNAL WORLD

They are out of their temporal environment ; the rich man has left his fine linen, and Lazarus his rags. What is left ? Character. The inner man is now free to make his own environment. So the man who has always depended on outward things is lonely and thirsty—lonely, because he did not “make to himself friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness” (S. Luke xvi. 9) ; thirsty, because he did not learn to drink of the living

water (S. John iv. 14). And Lazarus? In a life of loneliness and suffering he had found companionship and rest in the eternal. And so when the earthly environment fell away, companionship and rest ("Abraham's bosom") were his permanent portion. The lesson of the whole picture is that character makes destiny—that a man is in the eternal world what he has chosen to be or allowed himself to be.

HUMAN LIFE LOOKED BACK TO FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE ETERNAL

It has often been pointed out that the rich man's newly awakened interest in his brethren seems to show that in Hades he is learning the lessons that he failed to learn on earth. Perhaps this is reading more into the parable than our Lord intended. Anyway, it is part of his punishment that he cannot warn them. The closing words of the parable give the immediate purpose for which our Lord spoke it. He had been speaking just before about the law. Now He showed that "Moses and the Prophets" would give to an honest man the guidance he needed. A man who rejects the truth that lies within his reach, even if it is imperfect, has no right to expect fuller revealings of truth. The closing words are illustrated by our Lord's refusal to meet the demand for "a sign" that was so often made. It was not only that He would not startle men into belief; it was even more that belief so reached would be no true belief at all. An ingenious book was written some years ago picturing the return of Lazarus to warn the brothers of the rich man, and the effect on them of seeing his ghost.

The words were strangely fulfilled in the Jewish rulers a few months later, when "One rose from the dead" and left them still unrepentant.

The final lesson of the parable is the personal responsibility of every man for his own life. It is a warning against the modern idea that character is made by environment. The rich man ruined his life because he allowed it to be shaped by its environment; Lazarus saved his by refusing to yield to his environment, or rather, shall we say, by realising that the true environment of life is God. (The name Lazarus means "God is my help.") And, in the case of the five brethren, they must not be saved by a supernatural visitation from the obligation of finding truth for themselves. "Life's business being just the terrible choice."

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Luke xiv. 16-24)

THE parable falls naturally into two parts. The first part tells of an expected invitation rejected, the second part of an unexpected invitation accepted. The contrast was one that often appears in the teaching of our Lord (S. Luke xiii. 29; S. Matthew xxi. 43).

AN EXPECTED INVITATION REJECTED

The men who were summoned had already committed themselves. They had promised to come when the decisive moment was still far ahead; but in the interval other claims had grown up—claims of pleasure ("I have bought a piece of land")

or of business ("I have bought five yoke of oxen") or of domestic life ("I have married a wife"). It seems so easy to say, "If God calls me, I will give His call the supreme place," but when the call comes we find ourselves entangled in so many things. We have not kept ourselves free to obey. The picture is not of men deliberately rejecting the call to the feast, but of men quietly setting it aside. It is the tragedy of so many lives.

But our Lord warns us of two results. Firstly, there is the "anger" of disappointed love. If God really cares for human fellowship, it cannot be a matter of indifference to Him that men should "forsake their first love" and get absorbed in other things. Then there is the irretrievable loss (*damnum eternum*). The invitation is not renewed. The opportunity of closer fellowship does not come back. The men are allowed to do what they have chosen to do; only to discover too late that they have forfeited the privilege that they might have enjoyed. It is the old lesson; a divided allegiance can only end in disaster (S. Luke xvi. 13; S. James i. 8). A man who desires to "eat bread in the kingdom of God" must keep his life free for God.

AN UNEXPECTED INVITATION ACCEPTED

The men who might be expected to respond to the invitation have failed. What are the servants to do? S. Paul understood the meaning of the parable when he "turned to the Gentiles" (Acts xiii. 46). "Go to those who have no claim but their need." Men to whom the Gospel story is a familiar thing are constantly in danger of treating it as these men treated the invitation. But take it down to the streets and lanes of the

city, to the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind ; and it becomes a Gospel again. It was to men who are conscious of their need that Jesus Christ came (S. Matthew ix. 12, &c.).

But the streets and lanes of the city will not provide enough guests for the feast. We must reach out further—to the highways and hedges—the unevangelised world outside. The banquet hall is not yet full, and the servants of the Lord must not rest till the last guest has been gathered in.

(The words “Compel them to come in” were used in earlier times as a justification of the use of force to oblige people to profess their acceptance of Christianity. We now know that the only compulsion that can be used is moral compulsion. We must not treat Christ’s claim as a thing that a man may accept or reject as his personal preference dictates. “Compel them to come in” means “make them understand that God’s invitation cannot be rejected with impunity.”)

(3) Notice the threefold character of the Divine invitation.

(a) It is a *personal* invitation. God never says to men “go,” but always “come” (Isa. lv. 1; *compare* Jer. iii. 22). For man’s first need is to return to God. It was “come” that whispered in the heart of the prodigal in the far country, till at last he said, “I will arise and go to my Father.”

(b) It is a *free* invitation. *All things are ready.* The great truth that the reformers called “justification by faith,” was just that God’s forgiveness is given freely to all who ask. All the provision is His ; all the need is ours. And His provision is fuller than our need ; so that at the end

of the story the need is more guests, not more room.

(c) It is an *immediate* invitation. *Now*. The prophets taught men to look forward to a good that was still in the future. But the Christian messenger carries the message of a salvation that is a present fact. And because it is an immediate invitation the answer must be given at once. At every moment a man has to define his attitude towards the claim of Jesus Christ. We cannot evade the challenge. All things are ready; it is only men who are unready.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Luke xv. 3-10)

IT is the simplicity of these parables that has carried them further into the heart of humanity than any other parables of our Lord's. They turn around three ideas—ownership, loss, recovery.

OWNERSHIP

Both parables start with this. Every human life belongs to God; however degraded it may be, God does not renounce His claim. That was the first answer of Jesus Christ to the complaints of the Pharisees that He was consorting with publicans and sinners. Every life has its own special value to God. So our Lord taught that omniscience meant not only knowledge of the infinitely great, but also of the infinitely small. An omniscient God numbers our hairs, and knows the graves of the sparrows.

Loss

What do we mean when we speak of a man as lost? Not merely that he is out of the right road, but that he does not know how to get back again. He must be brought back by some power outside himself. The two parables seem designed to suggest two ways in which a man is lost. There is first the way of mere carelessness. Like a sheep he strays along thoughtlessly—not meaning any harm, but following the impulse of the moment, till at last he wakes up to find that he has lost his way. Then there is the way of indifference. Like a coin, he has no initiative; he becomes the mere sport of circumstances; if some accident sweeps him into a corner, there he will lie. A man may be lost by choosing his own way or by choosing no way at all. The parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates both these: he wanders away like a sheep; he sits by the swine-troughs like a coin in the dust. The word “lost,” as it fell from Christ’s lips, “was a word of infinite pathos and divine pity.” It has not here the sense of irretrievable ruin that it bears in S. John iii. 16 and xvii. 12.

RECOVERY

There is first the *concentration* on the effort to recover the lost. The idea of divine grace implies that God’s care is proportioned not to human desert, but to human need. That was the truth that the elder brother of the following parable could not understand. The shepherd does not care less for the ninety-nine, but love desires to rescue as well as to defend.

Does not this thought help to answer the question

why, among the many worlds that He rules, God became incarnate in this world? It was the one world that had lost its way—the one society of spiritual beings that had forgotten God. And we are told that other spiritual beings watch the great effort with sympathy (Eph. iii. 10, 1 Pet. i. 12, &c.).

Then there is the *certainty* of the quest. "Till he find it." There is no suggestion of ultimate failure. But there is a suggestion of the labour and effort by which the lost is reclaimed. It is not the sheep, but the shepherd, not the coin, but the woman, of whose toil and patience we are told. The real sinfulness of sin is that it gives God so much trouble.

But does this mean that :

"Not one life shall be destroy'd,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God has made the pile complete?"

Perhaps that is an unanswerable question. When divine grace sets itself against human self-will it is hard to believe that in the end human self-will can ever conquer.

Then lastly, there is the *gladness* of the rescue. In contrast with the words of Christ, Edersheim quotes a proverb of the Pharisees, "There is joy before God when those who provoke Him perish from the earth." It is a beautiful thought that, just as among men joy asks for sympathy, so in Heaven God shares His joy with His servants. There is no stronger bond of union than common gladness.

So the parable closes with a challenge. If we are in sympathy with the Divine purpose we shall learn to share the Divine joy. Next to the joy of rescue

there is no deeper joy possible here on earth than the joy that welcomes every life brought into the Kingdom. How the apathy of many Christians about foreign mission work would give place to keenness if only we understood more of this joy—the joy of the man who forgets his own claims and needs that he may share the gladness of God.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Luke vi. 36-42)

IN this passage our Lord is warning His disciples against the censorious spirit, of which the Pharisees provided so striking an example. Notice that it is in regard to people, not to moral questions, that He was speaking. God hates sin, but He does not hate sinners. That is the true attitude for the Christian man. It is not an easy attitude to keep, for if we must not condemn the sinner, how can we condemn the sin? The answer of Jesus Christ is that we are to try to feel as God feels and to act as God acts. There are two reasons for thus acting.

GRACE IS FOR THE GRACIOUS

God forgives the undeserving freely, but when they have accepted His forgiveness they must adopt the same attitude to others as He has adopted to them. For, in the long run, God treats us as we deserve (*see on this S. Matthew xviii. 23-35*).

So our duty is constantly to think the best of others. That is what Jesus Christ did, and that is why He brought out the best in men. And in this process He shows us four stages. It begins with

opinion (judge), then the expression of opinion (condemn), then action on its negative and positive side (forgive and give). It is an appeal for the open mind, the open heart, and the open hand. The order is significant. Real benevolence must work from within outwards—it must begin with right thinking.

AGAINST JUDGING OTHERS

The sketch of human duty is followed by three proverbs against presumption, two of which come in a rather different connection in S. Matthew's Gospel. They give us three reasons against judging other people.

(1) *The Realisation of our own ignorance.*—Before we ask any man to follow us we must be very sure that we know the way. Jesus Christ alone could say to men, "Follow me." S. Paul could only say, "Follow me, as I follow Christ" (1 Cor. xi. 1). The wise teacher will never be satisfied to attach disciples to himself; like S. John the Baptist, he will want to link them on to Christ (S. John i. 37).

(2) *The Example of Jesus Christ.*—If He, our Master, refused to condemn men, who are we that we should dare to do so? The true disciple is always growing more like his Lord, more loth to condemn, more eager to redeem.

(3) *The Consciousness of our own sinfulness.*—The man who knows his own heart will never be harsh in his judgment of others. The only way to think the best of others is to think humbly of ourselves. The illustration of the mote (or small twig) and the beam was a familiar Rabbinic parable. "The vices we scoff at in others laugh at us within ourselves," says Sir Thomas Browne. Every man

needs sometimes to exchange his magnifying glass for a mirror. Reform, like charity, begins at home.

But it does not end there. We *ought* to care about the mote in our brother's eye. Indeed, the motive for getting rid of the beam in our own eye is that we may be better able to help our brother. The great reason for fighting against sin in ourselves is that it hinders us from fighting against sin outside ourselves. The end of salvation is service.

The best name for the attitude of mind that our Lord outlines in these verses is magnanimity—large-heartedness. And magnanimity implies two things—a right knowledge of God and a right knowledge of ourselves; or, in other words, faith and humility. The two truths about God that are suggested in these verses are His grace and His justice. God is gracious, and therefore He treats men as they are capable of becoming (that is what “justification by faith” means); but God is just, and in the end He judges men by the actual response that they have made to the challenge of His grace. For we cannot turn one face towards God and another face towards our fellow-men. “Shouldst not thou have had compassion on thy fellow-servant even as I had pity on thee?”

The truth about ourselves is that self-satisfaction can only come from ignorance of our own hearts. Self-knowledge is the parent of humility, as humility is of every other Christian grace.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Luke v. 1-11)

WE may think of this Gospel as giving us four stages in the call of S. Peter to the apostolic office.

THE CALL TO SERVICE

Our Lord's first claim was for the use of S. Peter's boat ; a little later we find Him using S. Peter's house as a centre for healing and teaching (S. Mark i. 22). It was characteristic of His gracious courtesy that when He was about to confer on S. Peter the high honour of the apostolic vocation, He first asked a service of him, putting Himself, so to speak, under an obligation to His disciple. For friendship grows out of service rendered quite as often as out of service received. So from the beginning the disciples were taught to feel that they were colleagues, and not merely dependents, of the Master.

THE CALL TO OBEDIENCE

All S. Peter's fisherman's craft would have told him that our Lord's suggestion was a futile one. There was a moment's struggle in his mind between reason and faith, and then the victory was won. "I will let down the net." Would it be fanciful to see in the incident an illustration of two things—of the claim of religion over business life ; and of the spirit of Christian adventure ? When Jesus Christ was teaching from the boat, He was in His right place, but when He began to claim the right

to control the business of fishing, what then? S. Peter's answer seems to show that some such thought passed for a moment through his mind. Has Jesus Christ any claim over business life? In theory the Christian man can have no hesitation about his answer; but in practice, how often men act on the assumption that the principles of Christ are not valid within the doors of their office or shop?

Then again, the words of Jesus Christ seem to suggest that the spirit of adventure is part of the equipment of the Christian disciple. We must not hug the shore, we must "launch forth into the deep." The real question for every man is—how much are you prepared to risk on behalf of the cause—how much are you prepared to stake on the truth of Christianity? The Christian life is meant to be the adventurous life.

THE CALL TO CONFESSION

To the good man, nothing is so humbling as unexpected success. The feeling is bound to come "I did not deserve this." And it was vitally important for S. Peter, whose great danger was over-confidence, that at the outset he should realise his own need (*compare* Isa. vi.).

Dr. Maclaren compares this verse with S. John xxi. 7. Here the sense of sin leads to a desire to be away from Jesus Christ, but there a sense of sin sends the Apostle into the sea that he may reach our Lord the sooner. For he had learnt by then that "this man receiveth sinners."

It is worth noting that the revelation of the power of Christ came to S. Peter through the channel of his own business. His fisherman's trade was the avenue through which Christ revealed

Himself to him. A man need not desert his calling in order to find Christ; He will come into the boat; He will pass by the tax-gatherer's hut; He will transform ordinary things into sacraments.

THE CALL TO CONSECRATION

The miracle was a parable—a picture to the disciples of what their future life was to be. The patience and skill that they had learnt in their fishermen's craft were now to be given to a new task. S. Peter had learnt three lessons—that Christ needed him; that Christ could turn failure into unexpected success; that he needed Christ (for his prayer "depart from me" was really a prayer for salvation from himself). He had learnt the conditions of discipleship, and now that the moment came for decision there was no hesitation. He and his partners recognised that a new claim had come into their lives that superseded any other claim.

About this response to the call of Jesus Christ there are three things to be noted: (1) It was immediate; they did not want to consider or consult their friends; there are some things that a man must decide for himself; (2) it was complete; they "forsook all"; (3) it was unconditional; they made no bargain, asked for no terms:

"In simple trust like theirs who heard
Beside the Syrian Sea
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word,
Rise up and follow thee."

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Matthew v. 20-26)

IN this passage our Lord is illustrating the central principle of His ethical teaching—that

“It is the seed of act
God holds appraising in His hollow palm”—

that when God forbids an act, He forbids the attitude of mind that makes the act possible. Human justice can only deal with acts, but divine justice deals with motives. Our Lord shows how a man may break the sixth commandment, and how a man may keep it.

THE COMMANDMENT BROKEN

There are three degrees of wrongdoing, and our Lord illustrates them by reference to the Jewish legal system. It is as though He had said, “Anger is a misdemeanour, contempt is a felony, hatred is a capital offence.”

(1) *Anger*.—The words “without a cause” are a later addition to the text. “Righteous indignation” is always indignation against things, not against people. If I am angry at my brother’s folly or sin, I am so because I want to save my brother from them. And that is the only right kind of anger—not the anger that wants to destroy, but the anger that wants to save.

(2) *Contempt*.—It is bad to think evil; it is worse to give expression to our thoughts. The real evil of swearing is that it is an attempt to get

rid of anger by expressing instead of by overcoming it. It is not quite certain what the word "Raca" means. It appears to be a term of contempt, something like our English "Pouh!"—a mere sound without meaning. Contempt is a form of murder because it is an attempt to wound a man's self-respect. I may murder a man's reputation by holding him up to contempt. If we had a local court to try the sin of anger, we should have a higher court ("the council") to try the sin of contempt.

(3) *Hatred*.—The word "fool" implies moral worthlessness. Perhaps miscreant or scoundrel would be the nearest English equivalent. It implies more active hatred—a more deliberate desire to injure. So it corresponds to the most heinous sins that were punished with death and the burning of the body of the criminal in the Valley of Hinnom, where the fires were always kept burning to destroy the offal and rubbish from the city (on "Gehenna" see any dictionary of the Bible).

THE COMMANDMENT KEPT

The commandment is not a negative, but a positive thing. It demands a certain course of action, not mere abstinence from action. In this verse our Lord lays down the relation between the moral and the ceremonial sides of religion. The one is not a substitute for the other. But if we are to worship rightly we must *first* do rightly. We cannot ask for the Divine forgiveness unless we have first ourselves forgiven and been forgiven (S. Matthew vi. 12, 14). In the opening rubrics of our Communion Service specific provision is made for the fulfilment of this command. It is only

those who are "in love and charity with their neighbours" who are invited to "draw near." How much sweeter and kindlier human life would be if we simply accepted this word of our Lord's as a constant guide to our lives.

Our Lord enforces the command by a parable. Two men are on the way to court together. The defendant has a last chance of making reparation for the wrong that he has done, or paying the debt that he owes. The prosecutor may be willing to accept an apology and an acknowledgment of error. But if the opportunity passes, the case will go forward, and when once the law has been put into motion, there will be no possibility of friendly compromise.

Our Lord lays on His followers a twofold duty—they must be willing to forgive, and willing to ask for forgiveness if the offence has been on their side. The pride that will not "own up" is an outrage on the law of love (S. James v. 16).

May we not see a deeper meaning in the parable (see S. Luke xii. 58)? Every man is on his way to judgment, and God is beside him, waiting to forgive as soon as the appeal is made for mercy. But if we go on stubborn and unrepentant, we must face the tribunal at the end. "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." But our "adversary" (1 Pet. iii. 12) is also our saviour and our brother. Francis Thompson's "Hound of Heaven" brings out this thought. See also Browning's "Easter Day":

"Then did the form expand, expand—
I knew Him through the dread disguise
As the whole God within His eyes
Embraced me."

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Mark viii. 1-9)

THE close resemblance between this miracle and the feeding of the five thousand is to be accounted for by the fact that twice over almost exactly similar circumstances of need arose. It is strange, but quite in accordance with human nature, that the former miracle did not, apparently, occur to the minds of the disciples, when our Lord asked them the question about the people.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MIRACLE

(1) As in every other miracle, there is *sobriety and absence of sensationalism* about the action of our Lord. Apparently the people did not realise that any miracle had been done. All that they knew was that somehow a store of food had been procured for them. And the food itself was in no way supernatural—it was ordinary bread and fish—the simple food of Galilean peasant folk. There was (if we may so express it) an economy of miraculous power in the miracles of our Lord that is singularly impressive. When He superseded ordinary human processes, He did it calmly and quietly, as One Who is exercising a familiar right.

(2) *He uses available resources.*—He does not supersede human diligence. Only when the disciples have done their best does He do what they cannot do. So He said to one man, "Stretch out thy hand," and to another, "Arise and walk." Men were taught to feel that they had no right to expect a divine intervention to do for them what

they could do for themselves. Only when we have done our best can we claim the benediction without which our best can avail nothing.

(3) *He cares for the bodies as well as the souls of men.*—Almost all His miracles illustrate that fact. Our Lord had nothing of the contempt for the body and its needs that is characteristic of some Oriental religions. He recognised the justice of every man's claim to health and food and clothing. It has often been pointed out that our Lord laid down no economic system. But He did teach that every man had the right to a living wage—that God had provided enough for all if only production and distribution were rightly directed. His command, "Give ye them to eat," is a challenge to the statesmanship no less than to the benevolence of men. The greatness of Jesus Christ is never more pre-eminent than in His sympathy with the simplest human needs.

THE TRAINING OF THE DISCIPLES

(4) *The purpose of the miracles of Jesus Christ always included the training of the disciples.*—Every miracle was a parable in action. So we never hear of our Lord performing a miracle unless some at least of the disciples were present. What did the disciples learn from this miracle? Three things at least.

(1) The *compassion* of Jesus Christ. It is probably harder to have compassion on a multitude than on a few needy people. We are told that in war the very scale of the suffering has (perhaps fortunately) a deadening influence. But the heart of Jesus Christ was sensitive to the needs of the whole human race. "He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

(2) The *power* of Jesus Christ. It seems strange that they learnt that lesson so imperfectly (S. Mark viii. 10). Perhaps they were puzzled because at times He did no miracle (S. Mark vi. 5). But when they looked back over all the miracles of Jesus Christ, they beheld His glory (S. John i. 14, *compare* S. John ii. 11). There is no doubt at all that they connected this miracle with the Eucharist, and saw in this bread a picture of that other bread, blessed and broken, by which the faithful were assured of His continued presence.

(3) The *authority* of Jesus Christ. He asked of them all that they had to give, that He might use it for others. There was no question of His right to all that He chose to claim. It seemed a small request, but how often small requests are harder to respond to than large ones. It is the little sacrifices of every day in which we often fail. We are willing to give our lives to God, but we think that our loaves are our own. But even the "few little fishes," which apparently came to hand after the loaves had been handed over to Him—even these must be surrendered. The claim of others is not for what we have left after all our own needs have been supplied. Though the communism of the Church in Jerusalem seems to have been a temporary and not very successful experiment, the principle behind it was right. The things we call our own are, after all, only held in trust for the needs of the world—possession is stewardship.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Matthew vii. 15-21)

OUR Lord is thinking here not of heretics, but of hypocrites—men who set up as teachers of the Church from wrong motives (*see* 1 Pet. v. 2-3 for three such wrong motives). They creep into the flock disguised as sheep, that they may plunder and ravage. How are they to be recognised?

THE TEST OF THE FRUIT

The ultimate judgment on things is based, not on what they are, but on what they will be when they come to maturity. Much that seems specious enough stands condemned by this test. We must not judge any proposed moral change merely from the standpoint of the moment. What will its fruits be in ten years or twenty years? Sunday amusements, greater facilities for divorce, secular education—what will their fruit be when it comes to maturity? So with systems of thought—plausible attempts to find easier solutions of the problems of life. They often look pleasant enough in their green spring-time, but what fruit will they produce?

GOOD CANNOT COME OF EVIL

Our Lord uses two illustrations:

(1) *Vines and fig trees, thorns and thistles*.—In the prophets the vine and the fig tree are constantly associated together as the symbols of the divine blessing, while thorns and thistles are the symbols of the curse of sin (Gen. iii. 18, Heb. vi. 8). So sin does not produce good, any more than thorns produce grapes or thistles figs.

(2) *The good and rotten trees.*—Here the difference is not one of species but of quality. But the law is even more emphatically stated. A rotten tree *cannot* produce good fruit. But by the same law a good tree *cannot* produce bad fruit. Wherever there is good, there is God. Ultimately all forms of teaching or organisation must abide the test. There is a survival of the fittest in the spiritual no less than in the natural world. And the measure of fitness is character. It is interesting to notice how clearly the world has grasped this principle of the teaching of Christ. What the “man in the street” asks in regard to all forms of Church organisation and teaching is—what kind of character does it produce? Does it produce men who are humble and self-forgetful and honourable?

Our Lord teaches that there is nothing merely accidental about the production of goodness. Good acts grow out of a good heart. And wherever good acts are done there is a good heart behind them. It was the same lesson that He taught His disciples with regard to the man who “followed not with” them (S. Mark ix. 38). In Book X. of Browning’s “The Ring and the Book,” the Pope discusses the question why the flower of purity may spring from a chance-sown seed more perfectly than within the guarded garden of the Church. Our Lord does not answer that question, but He does warn us against refusing to recognise good wherever it springs. God has His wild flowers in unexpected places, as well as the flowers that grow in His garden.

EVIL DOES NOT LAST

In God’s eternal garden there are no weeds

(S. Matthew xv. 13). It is an inexorable law that useless things perish. So

“ Our little systems have their day,
They have their day, and cease to be.”

Only “ he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” In the life of the tree all else is subordinated to the function of fruit-bearing (*see* Mrs. King’s “ Sermon in the Hospital ” on the vine); so in human life all else is subordinate to the production of a good character.

“ How the world is made for each of us !
How all we perceive and know in it
Tends to some moment’s product thus,
When a soul declares itself—to wit,
By its fruit—the thing it does ! ”

The fate of the false prophet—the man whose character does not correspond with his profession—is destruction (*compare* Psa. i. 2).

THE RELATION OF CREED TO CHARACTER

This is expressed in another way in the last verse. Our Lord does not condemn those who called Him “ Lord ” (S. John xiii. 13), but He reminds them that a confession of faith is also a pledge of obedience (S. John vi. 46).

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Luke xvi. 1-9)

THIS parable has often perplexed people because our Lord seems to be commending a piece of pure roguery. But the whole meaning is explained

by the closing words. "In their generation" the children of this world are shrewd enough. And the Christian man must bring to the service of good exactly the qualities that they bring to the service of evil. So He takes a perfectly unscrupulous rogue and having shown how such a man manages to succeed, He tells His disciples that the same qualities, used for good and noble ends, will bring a truer and more lasting success.

What are the special qualities that our Lord commends in this unjust steward?

RESOURCEFULNESS

He is confronted with a demand that he cannot meet. But he does not lose courage and "throw up the sponge." He faces the situation quite clearly and decides on a course of action. We are to bring to the service of good the same quality of resourcefulness. We are to "pray as though everything depended on God, and then act as though everything depended on us." The man in the parable knew that his whole future depended on how he spent the few hours that remained to him before the account must be made up. From his own point of view he made the very best use of them. He had something to show at the end, though it was a bad thing. So our Lord seems to ask, "What will you have to show in the way of intelligent activity when life's opportunity is over?" (see S. Luke xix. 15, 16).

FORESIGHT

Here is a man who keeps his eye steadily on the future. The activities of the present are directed

to the securing of that future. He has suddenly awakened to the realisation that things will not always go on as they are, and so he makes the present opportunity serve future needs. To most men there comes the same consciousness. Something brings home to them the fact that life has a frontier across which is written, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." It is written on every sunset for men who have eyes to see :

" For note, when evening shuts,
A certain moment cuts
The deed off, calls the glory from the grey ;
A whisper from the west
Shoots—' Add this to the rest,
Take it and try its worth ; here dies another day.' "

Such a challenge, when it comes, is a real test of character. To a true man it is a call to prepare, not for death, but for life—the larger life to which this is only the prelude. As the foreground of life grows narrower, the vista beyond opens wider—our activities are more consciously related to the eternal world to which we belong. That is the true ideal of life—like a river that broadens as it nears the sea. It was the foresight of this steward that our Lord commended. A less shrewd man might have spent his last hours of freedom in wild debauch or impotent regret.

THOROUGHNESS

The unscrupulousness of the man is, in a sense, included in the Lord's commendation. Having determined to prove a villain, he is whole-hearted in his villainy. And, therefore, he is successful. Any twinge of conscience might have ruined all his

plans. And the same whole-heartedness is the secret of success in the service of good. How many lives are spoiled because they are half-hearted (S. James i. 8) or lukewarm (Rev. iii. 16). If it is worth while to be a Christian, it is worth while to go all lengths in the following of Christ—to venture all in His service.

Many other lessons have been gathered from the parable; as, for example, that to exact less than what is justly our due from others is wiser than strict justice; or that money spent in alms-deeds secures a welcome in the other world. But it is very doubtful whether such interpretations as these are not due to the attempt to find in the parable more than our Lord intended. The main lesson is clear enough. It is that a man should bring to his religion the same qualities of resourcefulness, foresight and thoroughness as a successful business man brings to his business.

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Luke xix. 41-47)

THE Gospel tells us of the patriotism of Jesus. His love for all the world did not mean indifference to family or country. Every Christian man must be a patriot, for he who loveth not his city or country which he hath seen, how can he love all mankind, whom he hath not seen? But true patriotism does not always mean cheering with the crowd; it sometimes means the lonely outcry of sorrow. Jeremiah was a truer patriot than the blatant crowd that jeered at his warnings

But sorrow is an incentive to action. So the tears of Jesus on the Mount of Olives were followed by the cleansing of the Temple and daily teaching there. When Isaiah asked how long he was to continue his witness to the people, the answer was : " Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant " (Isa. vi. 11). The protest for national righteousness must be maintained to the end, " whether they will hear or whether they will forbear." Three visions passed before our Lord's eyes as He saw the city spread out before Him.

THE VISION OF WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

" If thou hadst known " (*compare* S. Matthew xxiii. 37). There is nothing else so sad as lost opportunities. And opportunities may be lost through ignorance as well as through deliberate wantonness. Isaiah's complaint is that " Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider " (Isa. i. 3). The difference between a statesman and an opportunist is exactly this power of recognising " the things that belong unto our peace." For true patriotism will remember that peace, not aggression, is the real measure of national greatness. Jerusalem was torn with factions, which were only the more bitter because they were religious as well as political. Yet the very name of the city means " the city of peace " (Heb. vii. 2). The Prince of Peace came to the city of peace—and His own received Him not.

THE VISION OF WHAT WAS

Jerusalem was living under the illusion of security. As it was in the days of Jeremiah, when the people clung to the belief that God was bound to defend

His own city, though His name was dishonoured and His commands ignored, so it was in the days of Jesus Christ. The penalty of rejected truth is the loss of the capacity of insight. "Now they are hid from thine eyes." The man or nation that will not respond to the call of God becomes at last incapable of responding. Jerusalem had one last opportunity after the death of Jesus Christ, when the apostles began their witness in the city, but S. Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin marks the close of that last opportunity.

THE VISION OF WHAT WAS TO BE

The inevitable doom of the city that He loved lay like a dark shadow over our Lord's thoughts of the future (S. Mark xiii. 2, &c.). Even as He went out to His death He thought of the coming destruction of the city (S. Luke xxiii. 28). But the spirit of revenge had no place in His thought. As He wept over the city, so He prayed on the cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

God has chosen to give to men the gift of moral responsibility, with its inevitable consequence that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Yet God is not indifferent to the doom that men bring on themselves. That was the message of all the prophets, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord." And of that truth the Cross was the supreme evidence. God would go to all lengths to save the world, but the world must respond, or it must perish. Can we doubt that the Christ who grieved over Jerusalem grieves still over all shipwrecked lives, all failure to recognise the divine love? So the writer of

the Epistle to the Hebrews says that the man who turns away from the truth "crucifies the Son of God afresh" (Heb. vi. 6).

THE SEASON OF THY VISITATION

The word used here for visitation is the word from which the name for a bishop (*episcopus*) comes. In the Old Testament the corresponding word is used of the divine judgment (*see* Isa. x. 3 ; Jer. x. 15, &c.). In Job x. 12 and Psalm viii. 4 the idea of the divine grace is prominent, and in the New Testament the phrase is generally used in this sense (*see* S. Luke i. 68 ; vii. 16 ; 1 Pet. ii. 12). The Divine Overseer comes with His benediction, but unless men are watching they do not know, and so, unwelcomed and unrecognised, He passes by, and the season of visitation is over ; life's supreme opportunity has been lost.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Luke xviii. 9-14)

THERE are three parables on prayer peculiar to S. Luke's gospel. The other two (xi. 5-8 ; xviii. 1-8) teach the duty of persistence in prayer. The purpose of this parable is to show the right attitude of prayer.

Notice first how prayer is a revelation of character. To know what a man wants is to know what he is (*see* Ruskin, "The Crown of Wild Olive," ch. 2). For prayer, if it is real, is the expression of human need. In public worship we join in expressing our common needs, but our personal prayers reveal our personal characters.

There were three respects in which the prayer of the publican differed from that of the Pharisee. It was the expression of humility, need, and aspiration.

HUMILITY

The Pharisee congratulates himself on his unlikeness to other men; the publican takes his stand among the common crowd, just a man alone with God. As our Lord showed us in the Lord's Prayer, prayer is meant to be a bond of union in the consciousness of our common need; not a barrier of separation. So it is "give *us*," "forgive *us*," "lead *us*."

To congratulate ourselves that we are unlike other men is always dangerous. It is far better to be glad that we share the common humanity that Jesus Christ "took upon Him for its deliverance." *In medio tutissimus ibis*, says the Latin proverb—we are safest when we are on the broad highway of human life, claiming nothing for ourselves but the right to be men in a world of men. All claims to privilege are dangerous, since they all minister to pride. And pride is more directly disastrous to the life of the spirit than any other sin.

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF NEED

The prayer of the Pharisee contains no expression of need. And without the sense of need prayer must always be incomplete. We ought to thank God for every hunger of the soul that sends us back to Him. For it is to the hungry that the promise of good comes (S. Luke i. 53; vi. 21).

The special need of which the publican was conscious was the need of forgiveness. An outcast from public life, the agent of alien extortion, he

could hope for no mercy from men. So he appeals from the condemnation of men to the mercy of God. It was just such men as this among whom our Lord found not a few of His early disciples (S. Matthew ix. 10, xi. 19, xxi. 32 ; S. Luke v. 27, xv. 1, xix. 2). It was hard for a Pharisee to recognise his own sinfulness while all the world looked up to him as a paragon of virtue. So to him "the friendship of the world" became a snare (S. Luke vi. 26). Never do we need to cultivate the habit of self-examination so much as when we are respected by the people around us.

Our Lord condemns the Pharisee because his prayer contains no confession of sin. How, then, are we to explain the fact that no confession of sin is recorded as coming from the lips of Jesus Christ ? There is only one possible explanation—that His life is unique in that no taint of sin marred its perfect obedience (Heb. iv. 15 ; 1 Pet. ii. 22).

ASPIRATION

The Pharisee's prayer was the prayer of a self-satisfied man ; there is no possibility of progress in the life of a man who could "pray thus with himself." There is no other failure in life so complete as the failure that thinks it has attained (Phil. iii. 12). But the publican, "standing afar off," sees all the road before him that leads to God at the end. We never know a man till we know not only what he is, but also what he aspires to be.

"All I aspired to be,
All men ignored in me,
That I was worth to God, whose hand the pitcher shaped."

(See Browning's "Old Pictures in Florence," for

the relative value of achievement and aspiration.)

So the publican "went down to his house justified rather than the other." For God, Who sees the end from the beginning, estimates human lives by the standard of what they are capable of becoming. A man will become in the end what he prays to be.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Mark vii. 31-37)

WE may consider this miracle as an illustration of some of the methods of our Lord, for His acts of healing were always parables in action as well as acts of benevolence. S. Mark evidently regards the details of the miracle as significant.

HE TOOK HIM ASIDE

In our Lord's ministry we can see a gradually increasing tendency to withdraw from crowds and deal with individuals (S. John v. 13). To Him every human soul had its own distinctive value. And the atmosphere of excitement was not the atmosphere in which He was most at home. The deepest needs of our souls call us to be alone with Him. Worship and work belong to the social life of men, but religion tends to become shallow unless there is the shut door and the secret communion. We must come aside from the multitude when we are in need of the healing power of Christ.

HE TOUCHED HIM

Our Lord often used this method (S. Mark vi. 5, viii. 23 ; S. Luke iv. 40, &c.). It was a sacramental act—"the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." To a deaf and dumb man the sign was specially significant as the only way in which our Lord could convey to him the fact that the healing virtue was a personal gift from Him. But was there not a deeper truth in the act? It is by personal contact with Christ that the souls of men are healed (S. Mark v. 27, vi. 56). It is not enough to learn of Him, or to follow Him; our lives must touch His life if we are to be made whole. It was the same truth that He taught with deeper significance when He instituted the Holy Communion. His life must pass into our life; first by an act of faith, then by a constant process of communion.

HE LOOKED UP TO HEAVEN

This heavenward look expressed the oneness of Jesus Christ with the Father in His good will to men. It taught the disciples to recognise the source from which He drew all His strength for service (S. John v. 36, xiv. 10). However mysterious the presence of suffering and evil in the world may be, we must never lose the assurance that the purpose of God is always to heal and restore and save. Our human efforts against suffering and evil need the same consecration. Social service must "look up to heaven" for its strength. For the true gladness of service is not in the gratitude of men, but in the consciousness of fellowship with our Father in Heaven (S. Matthew v. 45-6).

HE SIGHED

It is only in such references as this that we see how the perfect sympathy of Christ "bore our griefs and carried our sorrows." (*Compare* S. Mark viii. 12.) He could not be the Saviour of men unless He could enter into and understand their needs. So the sigh of Jesus was the expression of His sympathy with men, as His heavenward look was the expression of His sympathy with God.

"The Son of God in doing good
Was fain to look to Heaven and sigh;
And shall the heirs of sinful blood
Seek joy unmixed in charity?"

No true service for men can be done without sympathy; and sympathy means sharing the suffering that we relieve. So we also "groan within ourselves" (Rom. viii. 23; the Greek word is the same that is used here). George Eliot speaks of the happiness of sympathy as a sort of happiness that "often brings so much pain with it that we can only tell it from pain by its being what we should choose before everything."

HE CHARGED THEM TO TELL NO MAN

(*Compare* S. Mark i. 44, v. 43, &c.) Various suggestions have been made to account for this charge. The healing of the sick was not the main purpose of our Lord's earthly ministry, and the gathering of great crowds of sufferers hindered His work of teaching (S. Mark i. 45). But our Lord must surely have had in view also the influence over the healed man of public notoriety. It is good that every man should confess his faith before men, but it is good also that there should

be sacred places in our lives where only the Lord has the right to come—secrets of healing and strength that we share only with Him. Remember the answer of Sir Bois, in Tennyson's "Holy Grail":

" ' Ask me not, for I may not speak of it ;
I saw it ' ; and the tears were in his eyes."

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Luke x. 23-37)

TO the question of the lawyer, " Who is my neighbour ? " our Lord answers, " What is neighbourliness ? " And the parable is the answer to that question. It shows us three characteristics of the neighbour instinct.

IT FORGETS

The man was a Samaritan, separated by age-long barriers of racial hatred from the wounded Jew (S. John iv. 9). But in face of the claim of human need all this was forgotten (Rom. xii. 20 ; S. Matthew v. 43). Neighbourliness is the spirit that measures its giving, not by the standard of claim or desert, but by the standard of need. Who is my neighbour ? Every man whom circumstances bring within your reach, for whom you can do any service.

IT ACTS

No doubt the Levite who crossed the road to look at the wounded man felt real pity ; but he did nothing. Real compassion always acts.

The Samaritan acted *immediately*, because he acted by instinct. If he had stopped to reason, he

might have found plenty of excuses for leaving the man unhelped. Sometimes our first thoughts are best, because they come from our truest selves. How often men have left their duty undone because they stopped to think about it. Again, he acted *wisely*. He rendered "first aid" to the wounded man with skill. He knew how to deal with the case, and had the necessary materials at hand. The instinct of compassion is not enough; we must know how to deal with the needs of men. Under modern conditions, wise helpfulness needs some expert knowledge. Benevolence that will not take trouble is of very little use.

He acted *adequately*. Having taken up the case, the Samaritan is prepared to see it through. He does not prop the man by the roadside in the hope that some other traveller will bring him on. He does not leave him till he has deposited him in the care of the inn-keeper.

IT SACRIFICES

Neighbourliness involved the sacrifice of time, labour, money—and all for a stranger who had (so we should have said) no claim on him. But it was exactly the recognition of the claim that constituted the lesson of the story. To love our neighbour as ourself does not mean to give in the expectation of corresponding return, but to give expecting no return (S. Matthew v. 44-47), because:

"The dear God Who loveth us,
He made and loveth all."

It was the same lesson that our Lord enforced in another parable (S. Matthew xxv. 40). In ministering to human need we are ministering to Him. With

the whole incident compare the " Legend Beautiful " of the monk who left the vision of Christ to feed the poor at the convent gate (*see* Longfellow's " Tales of a Wayside Inn ").

The Fathers saw in the story of the Good Samaritan an allegory. The man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho represents humanity going down from the Holy City to the city of the curse, and despoiled of his robe of innocence by the Evil One on the way. The Priest and the Levite are the representatives of the old law, which had no gospel for the stricken and wounded. The Good Samaritan is Jesus Christ, healing with the oil of the Spirit and the wine of His Blood; setting humanity on " His own beast " (*see* 2 Cor. viii. 9. " By His own discomfort He sought our comfort "), and bringing him to the inn of His Church, where those whom He has rescued are cared for. (The Church is an inn, " because it receives all who wish to enter "—Origen.) Like the Samaritan, He must go away, but He will return and repay all who have spent of their substance for Him. According to some interpreters, the two pence are the two sacraments of the Gospel.

We need not hesitate to recognise the truth of this method of interpretation; for the grace of neighbourliness that our Lord commends to the lawyer finds its supreme illustration in His own life. The command, " Go and do thou likewise," was equivalent to the command, " Follow Me." Devotion and practical service are both part of the Christian life, and the connecting link between them is the fact that both find their supreme example in Jesus Christ.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Luke xvii. 11-19)

THE Gospel for last week gave us a Jew and a Samaritan as neighbours in service; the Gospel for to-day gives us Jews and Samaritans as neighbours in misfortune. In both cases it is the Samaritan who proves himself the true man.

The story of the healing of the ten lepers is a lesson of faith and a lesson of gratitude.

A LESSON OF FAITH

They were commanded to act on the assumption that their prayer was being answered. That is what Jesus Christ often commanded men to do (S. Mark xi. 24; S. Matthew ix. 6; xii. 13, &c.) And that is what faith means still. We have probably all heard the story of the old lady who was encouraged by the promise in the Bible to pray earnestly that a certain hill near her house might be removed, and who, looking out next morning, exclaimed: "There it is still; I *knew it would be*." Faith often means assuming that what we have prayed for will be provided, and acting on the assumption. So the disciples were told to act on the assumption that the Holy Spirit would be near them at the hour of need (S. Mark xiii. 11). All religion is assumption verified by experience. We know only as we do (S. John vii. 17).

The command to go and show themselves to the priests (*compare* S. Mark i. 44) shows our Lord's desire to respect the existing administrative system. Men were not to think that they might set at

naught the social regulations of the community (see 1 Peter ii. 13).

A LESSON OF GRATITUDE

It is a sad lesson, yet must we not confess that it is a true one? It is not perhaps altogether that men are ungrateful for mercies vouchsafed to them ; it is that gratitude finds no outward expression, and dies unexpressed. There are three things to notice about the man in the parable.

(1) *He dared to be in a minority.*—The other nine presumably went on to do what Jesus had told them to do, but this man dared to appear disobedient. He broke the letter of the command to fulfil the spirit. He did a thing that requires no little courage—ignored public opinion (the opinion of the little group to which he belonged) to do what he felt was right. No doubt he went to the priests afterwards, that his cure might be properly attested. But he felt that something else must come first (*compare* S. Matthew v. 24). Answered prayer ought to send us back to the feet of Christ.

(2) *He gave public expression to his gratitude.*—In place of the hoarse whisper of the leper, there is now the “loud voice.” His confession should be as public as his appeal had been. And his first instinct was to thank God. It is a very real test of a man’s character whether unexpected success or deliverance sends him first of all to God. How much good we might do if we were not ashamed to give public expression to our thanks. The phrase “Thank God !” may be mere cant, but it may be a real witness to the Christian character of the man who uses it.

(3) *He fell down at His feet.*—As a leper he had

been obliged to stand afar off, but now he can come near. And as his first instinct was to thank God for his healing, his next was to thank the great Teacher Who had healed him. We can hardly miss the note of disappointment in the question of Jesus Christ, "Where are the nine?" Ingratitude is one of the meanest things in human nature, yet how sadly common it is. And how often it is a "stranger" who surprises us with unexpected thanks.

(4) "*Thy faith hath saved thee.*"—The phrase was one that our Lord used four times to different people (S. Luke vii. 50, viii. 48, xviii. 42). He apparently intended it to mark the transition from physical to spiritual healing. It is as though He had said, "You have learnt the secret of bodily healing, now go and apply the same principle to your spiritual nature—go and be whole in a deeper sense." So a thankful spirit was rewarded with a fuller blessing.

The early Church called the Holy Communion service the Eucharist, because it was our service of thanksgiving, when we fall down at His feet giving Him thanks. And to us, too, comes the command, "Arise and go thy way; thy faith hath saved thee."

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Matthew vi. 24-34)

OUR Lord had been warning His disciples against covetousness, and in these verses He warns them against anxiety. The connecting link between the two lines of thought is in the parable

of the two masters. A slave cannot serve two masters, because a master had complete control of his slave. And if two masters tried to go shares in one slave the result would be certain to be that affection ("love") or self-interest ("hold to") would lead the slave to prefer one to the other, and so in the end become the slave of one.

The covetous man is trying to serve two masters, for covetousness is idolatry (Col. iii. 5). But as whole-heartedness in the service of God delivers us from covetousness, so also it delivers us from anxiety. So our Lord turns to this subject. The passage is divided into three sections by the repetition of the words, "Be not anxious." There are three reasons against anxiety.

THE ARGUMENT FROM REASON AND FROM NATURE (verses 25-31)

The argument is twofold: (a) You are obliged to trust God for life itself, is it not therefore reasonable to trust Him for the lesser thing—the means of livelihood? (b) Nature teaches a lesson of trust. The birds and the flowers are cared for by God, though they are inferior to you in three ways:

(i.) They cannot provide for their own future—they "sow not," they "toil not"—but man has been given power to control nature, to reap and gather into barns (agriculture); to toil and spin (industry). "We are better than they in this, that God has given us the privilege of influencing the future by our fruitful toil, by the sweat of our brow and the labour of our hands" (Dr. Maclaren).

(ii.) They have not learnt to say "Our Father." It is *your* heavenly Father Who feeds them. "You are above them by the nearer relation which you

sustain to your Father in Heaven" (Dr. Mac-laren).

(iii.) They have no eternal destiny. The grass "to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven." Yet how beautiful God makes it!

"If by reason and will I could reach the godlike calm and courage of what we so thoughtlessly call the timid turtle-dove, I should lead a nearly perfect life."—Richard Jefferies.

THE ARGUMENT FROM REVELATION (verses 31-33)

Anxiety is heathen—"after all these things do the Gentiles seek." All true religion is based on the idea that God is not indifferent to the needs of His creatures. The teaching of Jesus Christ, with its name of "Father" for God, was directly against the spirit of anxiety.

(3) THE ARGUMENT FROM EXPERIENCE (verse 34)

Every day brings its own anxieties. Why make the burden more heavy by adding those of to-morrow? "Take short views of life" is wise advice. How many lives are harassed by constant worrying over evils that never come.

Our Lord never discouraged wise forethought (S. Luke xiv. 28), but wise forethought is the opposite to the spirit of anxiety. In one sense, the Christian man is always looking forward, working for the future. But when he has done his best, he leaves the issue to God in "quietness and confidence." The word used here for "being anxious" is probably derived from a Greek word meaning "to be drawn in different directions" (*compare* English

“distracted”). The remedy for anxiety is the single-mindedness that “seeks first the Kingdom of God” (Phil. iv. 6). For another kind of single-mindedness, the whole-hearted service of Mammon, see S. Luke xii. 16–20. The rich fool was “not anxious about the morrow,” because he had given up trying to serve two masters, only to discover too late that he had chosen the wrong one (1 Tim. vi. 9). On the true ideal of human life, see the closing passage of Ruskin’s “Unto This Last.”

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Luke vii. 11–17)

THE simple beauty and reserve of this story leaves little scope for the commentator. It is characteristic of S. Luke in its picture of the human-kindness of Jesus Christ, Who “went about doing good.” More even than most of the miracles of our Lord, this incident seems the direct outcome of simple human sympathy. Perhaps it was the only occasion on which He actually came face to face with a funeral procession. It was a direct challenge.

The meeting itself is dramatic. The crowd coming up the hillside, with the Lord of life at their head, meets the crowd going down the hill, with the symbol of death in their midst. And at His word and touch the two processions halt. Jesus Christ is face to face with death. Then follows the threefold challenge.

THE CHALLENGE OF SORROW

“The only son of his mother, and she was a

widow." The whole pathos of human sorrow is in the words. Was Jesus Christ Himself the only son of His mother, and she a widow? If so, the tears of the widow of Nain were a foreshadowing of the tears of the Blessed Virgin at the cross. The words "Weep not" were no merely conventional expression of sympathy. They were a message of hope. Our Lord never condemned human tears; He knew that love needs rain as well as sunshine. But He saw the sunshine beyond the rain, and He came not only to share human tears (Isa. liii. 4), but to wipe them away (Isa. xxv. 8).

THE CHALLENGE OF IMPOTENCE

Limbs that could not move, lips that could not speak! But at the word of Christ the limbs moved and the lips spoke. It is worthy of note that the greatest miracles of our Lord seem done with the least effort. He raised the dead with a word (S. Luke viii. 54; S. John xi. 43). Perhaps the truth was that the more deeply His sympathy was stirred, the more spontaneously the virtue of healing flowed forth from Him. In other cases, where human sorrow was less prominent, there is a sense almost of effort. But here "He speaks as master of those who repose in an eternal sleep; and it is thoroughly felt that He is the God of the dead as of the living, never more tranquil and calm than when He is operating the grandest things."

THE CHALLENGE OF SEPARATION

The real tragedy of death lies in the sense of irretrievable separation. The gateless barrier stands between us and those with whom we walked so lately.

The certainty of reunion would rob death of half its sadness. So our Lord reunited the widow and her son—"He delivered him to his mother."

May we not recognise in this incident a picture in miniature of what Christianity has done in meeting the challenge of death? All that the heathen world taught about death left men impotent in face of its sorrow, inactivity, and separation. It was only the teaching, and above all the resurrection, of Jesus Christ that gave men the assurance that beyond the sorrow was joy, beyond the inactivity fuller life, and beyond the separation reunion. Joy, service, and fellowship are the permanent things that Jesus Christ came to restore.

THE EFFECT OF THE MIRACLE

For a little while it awakened awe and interest, which spread into Judea (Nain was almost certainly in Galilee), and even reached S. John the Baptist in his prison. But the crowd soon forgets (S. Luke xvi. 31), and it was only among the disciples that the memory of the incident was cherished. It has been suggested that S. Luke may have heard it from one of the pious women who followed Jesus. It has often been noticed that his Gospel tells more than any of the others of our Lord's tenderness to women. May not this characteristic have been due to the close relationship in which early tradition connects S. Luke with the Blessed Virgin?

Though only three occasions on which our Lord raised the dead are recorded in the Gospels, we need not assume that there were no others. Perhaps such events seemed less startling in that age than they would be to-day, because it was believed

that the bond joining soul and body only gradually broke, so that for a little while after death the soul was not far from the body that it had left. Only when decay began did the separation become complete.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Luke xiv. 1-11)

THE Pharisee's invitation was apparently part of a scheme to entrap our Lord into some act that could be used against Him. The man with the dropsy was probably brought there to arouse the compassion of Jesus Christ, and so lead to a technical breach of the Sabbath law. In this passage our Lord teaches two lessons.

A LESSON OF COMPASSION

On no fewer than six occasions recorded in the Gospels our Lord came into collision with Jewish tradition through acts of healing done on the Sabbath day. (For the Pharisaic regulations about the Sabbath, see Appendix XVII. of Edersheim's "Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.")

Here our Lord answers the unspoken criticisms of His antagonists by reminding them that the Sabbath law would not be allowed to stand in the way of claims of family or property, if a son (as the word apparently was in the original text), or even an ox, *of theirs* had fallen into a well, the work of rescue would not be deferred. But all men are God's children; all men are God's property. If it is right for a man to rescue his own from danger, is it not

right that the Son of God should rescue His own from disease? (*Compare* Ch. xiii. 15, 16; S. Matthew xii. 12). How different moral questions appear when our own interests are involved. The man who realises this will not be too ready to condemn others.

But perhaps the thought in the mind of our Lord was also that men are often better than their creed; that the instinct of compassion lies deeper than fine-drawn distinctions of legalism; that it is often wiser to trust men's hearts than their heads. If so, His words may have been a final appeal to the Pharisees to be true to their best selves—to sweep away the cobwebs that hid from them the golden dome of the divine love. But the appeal was in vain; they were silenced, but not convinced.

A LESSON OF HUMILITY

The scramble at the feast became, in our Lord's mind, a "parable," or symbol of human life, with its ruthless struggle for the highest places. Our Lord was apparently thinking of Prov. xxv. 6, 7. The desire for respect is not, in itself, a wrong desire, but the only respect worth having is not won by over-estimating, but by under-estimating ourselves. It is better to claim less than our due rather than more. No doubt our Lord was thinking, not of human banquets, but rather of the feast to which one of the guests referred a little later (verse 15). At that feast the Pharisees felt assured of the places of honour; but our Lord warns them that the divine estimate may be widely different from the human. "There are last that shall be first." The humble man will be content to know that at the great feast there will be a place for him, and

that if one man is honoured above another it will be because the King wills it so, not because he has pushed himself to the front. The self-assertive spirit has no place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The question is often asked, Does it pay to be humble? Does not the teaching of our Lord and His apostles present an ideal impracticable under the conditions of modern life? It is true that self-assertiveness often brings immediate success, but is not that success dearly paid for by the deterioration of character that it brings with it? A man may often have to choose between worldly success won by self-assertion and "push," and a humbler place that leaves character untarnished. For in the long run it is impossible for a man to be arrogant and self-assertive towards his fellow-men and yet remain humble towards God. The thought behind the words of Christ is that in the end men reach the place that they deserve, not the place they think they deserve (2 Cor. x. 18). Verse 11 was apparently repeated by our Lord on two other occasions (Ch. xviii. 14; S. Matthew xxiii. 12). It is the teaching of the Magnificat.

Compare our Lord's reply to the petition of the sons of Zebedee (S. Mark x. 40): "I can only give you the place of sacrifice; the place of honour is My Father's to give."

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Matthew xxii. 34-46)

A QUESTION, and a counter-question- the last of the series that occupied the "Day of Questions." The Herodians and the Sadducees

had been put to silence. Now a scribe or lawyer takes up the task of questioning, not as a mere caviller, but with a genuine desire to test the competence of the new Teacher.

THE QUESTION

To the Scribes the law appeared as a long series of commands. Were they all equally important or could they be put in any order? Our Lord's reply (as in the Sermon on the Mount) is an appeal from *act* to *attitude*. Law is an intolerable burden unless love is the motive behind it. It was just this that the Scribes and Pharisees had forgotten. So our Lord refers to Deut. vi. 5, and Lev. xix. 18. In Deut. vi. 5 the words are "all thy heart and soul and strength." Here "mind" takes the place of "strength." (S. Mark gives all four.) The heart is the seat of will or desire; the soul of feeling; the mind of thought; while strength suggests action. Love (*agape*, a word almost coined by Christianity) is not a mere emotion, but the exercise of all the faculties of our nature—a voluntary, rational impulse that expresses itself in action—the heart that desires, the soul that feels, the mind that thinks, and the strength that does. This is the answer to the objection that we cannot make ourselves love God and our neighbour. Love is the natural impulse of true humanity—in proportion as we become true men it is natural for us to love. It is apathy and hatred that are unnatural. It is as though our Lord said, "Give scope to your true self—that is what the law means. All its details fit into their place as part of a great programme of love to God and men."

Notice how both commands meet in Jesus Christ—

to love Christ is to love God, for He is the final revelation of the Divine ; but to love Christ is also to love men, for He is the true representative of humanity.

S. Matthew omits the beautiful closing words of S. Mark's account (S. Mark xii. 32-34) with our Lord's commendation of the questioner.

OUR LORD'S COUNTER-QUESTION

The question had a two-fold purpose. It was an exposure of the incompetence of the Pharisees as religious teachers, and it was an appeal to them to think more deeply and inquire more earnestly. Our Lord often raised questions in the minds of His hearers to which He did not immediately supply answers (S. John xvi. 19).

Our Lord assumes (1) that the Psalm was written by David, and (2) that it refers to the Messiah. His hearers had no doubt on either point, and for the purposes of the argument that was all that was necessary. On their own showing the problem was one that they ought to have considered. If this was all that our Lord intended we might feel that He merely gained a verbal triumph over His questioners ; but, as in every other question on this day, the merely verbal problem led on to a deeper question. (*Compare* verses 21 and 32.) Here the deeper question raised is as to the twofold character of the Messiah as pictured in the Old Testament : a King who reigns, yet a Servant who suffers ; a descendant of David, yet his Lord ; a human champion, yet a Divine Redeemer. How little they suspected that He Who spoke to them was Himself the solution to the problem : " born of the seed of David according to the flesh," and destined to be

"declared to be the Son of God . . . by the resurrection from the dead."

No One was Able to Answer.—They must have felt that it was no mere verbal quibble that Jesus Christ had propounded. They were accustomed to playing with words, but here was something deeper. So the "Day of Questions" ended as the questioners stole off silently, some of them perhaps to think, but most of them to plot for the destruction of the new Teacher, whose challenge to their authority they had failed to meet. They had been confronted with a demand for sincerity—a demand that they dared not face. So the questions of Jesus Christ became tests. Men of honest and good heart, like the disciples, came back to Him for the answer (S. Matthew xiii. 30; xvii. 10, etc.); men of dishonest and evil heart went away and communed how they might destroy Him.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Matthew ix. 1-8)

THIS miracle is recorded in all the three first Gospels. The fullest account is in S. Mark's Gospel, where we learn how the sick man was brought by his friends and let down through the roof. From S. Mark we learn that "His own city" was Capernaum, which Jesus had made His headquarters after His rejection in Nazareth (S. Luke iv. 30). The house in which He was teaching was probably S. Peter's house (see S. Mark i. 29). S. Luke tells us that a deputation of Pharisees and doctors of the law had come from Jerusalem and other places to interview the new

Teacher. Jesus therefore took advantage of the occasion to set forth a solemn claim. So the story tells us of a challenge, a counter challenge and the response.

THE CHALLENGE

The man had come with his friends in hope of bodily healing, but our Lord was unwilling to be regarded merely, or chiefly, as a "faith-healer." He had come to bring to men a deeper gift than physical health. So in His words to the sick man we may see an assertion of the relative importance of the outer and the inner life. He did not ignore the needs of the body; but He did not give them the foremost place. The lesson is one that we still need. The social message of Christianity has to do with the outer life—with housing and healing and proper conditions of labour. But below all these things there lies the deeper need—the need of spiritual healing—of reconciliation with God. And men who ask of religion the healing of the social diseases of our time must be reminded that sin lies at the root of them all. A religion that can say "Arise and walk," will not save the world unless it can first say, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

THE COUNTER-CHALLENGE

It was the paradox of the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees that their evil thoughts sprang apparently from a right motive. It was right that they should be jealous for the honour of God. But they condemned Jesus Christ without any adequate inquiry. They were too certain about their own ideas to be willing to learn. The thought in their mind was that to say "Thy sins be forgiven thee"

was easy enough, because no one could verify or disprove the claim. Hence their demand was always for "a sign from heaven" (S. Matthew xii. 38; S. John ii. 18; 1 Cor. i. 22)—something that could be seen and tested. They were blind to the moral miracle of the character of Jesus Christ. On this occasion Jesus met their challenge.

THE RESPONSE

The sick man was not to be deprived of the blessing that he came to seek because of the cavillings of the scribes. For the four friends who had brought him had a claim. They could not give health to the sick man, but they could do a better thing—they could bring him to Jesus. There is something very touching about the story of these men who asked for nothing themselves, but only a gift for their friend.

The threefold command of our Lord gave back to the sick man the three gifts that belong to human life.

(1) The gift of *life* ("Arise"). Paralysis is a living death; an existence of impotence. So life was the first gift that Jesus offered, if the sick man dared to claim it.

(2) The gift of *labour* ("Take up thy bed"). As Bengel quaintly says, "The bed had borne the man; now the man was bearing the bed." Would it be too fanciful to say that part of the gift of Christ to men has been that instead of making our circumstances a bed to lie on we are to shoulder them as a burden to carry—to be their master instead of their servant? When our Lord healed people, He often gave them some simple, practical thing to do, as if to make them feel that they had

come back to "the trivial round, the common task" (see S. Mark v. 43). When a man has been healed, he must be content to take up the burden of common things.

(3) The gift of *love* ("Go home"). Sometimes Jesus called men to leave their homes and follow Him; but at other times He sent them home (S. Mark v. 19). He did not want this man to become an object of popular curiosity. And the man's prompt obedience showed that he understood. The people at home had the first right to know how he had been healed and forgiven. The love and gratitude of home were the best atmosphere in which he could realise the tremendous change that had rewarded his faith and courage.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Matthew xxii. 1-14)

THIS parable, spoken on one of the last days of our Lord's earthly ministry, has a sterner note than the corresponding parable of the Great Supper (S. Luke xiv.). Here it is a royal invitation that is rejected, and rejected without excuse. And the messengers are ill used and slain, so bringing on the city the punishment of destruction.

The parable is notable for the wide sweep of its outlook. It is a prophetic picture of the whole history of the Christian Church, from the day when the earliest disciples went out with the royal invitation to the day when the final judgment separates the wheat from the tares (S. Matthew xiii. 30). First, there is the early indifference, then the active hostility of the world, then the ingathering of mul-

itudes " both bad and good " into the society, and then the purging of the Church and the rejection of the unworthy.

Let us consider the parable as illustrating three types of rejection.

THE REJECTION OF INDIFFERENCE

" They made light of it." The fault here is a lack of any true sense of proportion. They are invited to share the King's joy (for that is the idea of a marriage feast), but they prefer occupying themselves with their own affairs. They are like the men who say that they have no time for religion ; if they carry on their own business honourably, what more can God expect of them ! So the gentleman goes to his estate, and the trader goes to his business, and the claim of God is forgotten. Such men are not opposed to religion ; they quietly leave it on one side. And in the parable our Lord shows how this attitude is an insult to God.

THE REJECTION OF HATRED

The attack on the messengers seems irrational, as indeed all persecution really is. The hostility of the authorities against Christianity had just the same irrational character. When He spoke of the burning of the city, our Lord was thinking primarily of the destruction of Jerusalem, which was so constantly in His thoughts during these last days of His earthly life (S. Matthew xxi. 41 ; xxiii. 37 ; S. Luke xxiii. 29, &c.). But the lesson goes further. No community can set itself against God and prosper. Hatred of God is a self-destructive thing.

THE REJECTION OF INDOLENCE

The third picture brings us within the visible Church. Our Lord does not picture the Church as a society of righteous people. There are "false brethren" within the family, as there was a traitor among the apostles (S. Matthew xiii. 47). It is not till the King comes in to see the guests that the Church is purified of its corrupt members (S. John xv. 2).

It is to be supposed that our Lord intended His hearers to understand that provision had been made for supplying wedding garments to all the guests, otherwise the man could hardly be held blameworthy for coming from the highway unprepared. The ground of his condemnation was that he had taken no trouble; that he had presumed upon the freeness of the invitation. He had made no effort to be worthy of the honour that had been done him. Like the earlier invited guests he had "made light of it."

God's invitation to men to enter into fellowship with Him is an unconditional invitation, but when a man has accepted it—when he has come into the visible Church—he is pledged to a definite effort to walk worthy of his calling. He must "put on the new man" (Ephes. iv. 24; cf. Rom. xiii. 14). "Justification by faith" means that nothing in a man's past record need stand in the way of his forgiveness as soon as he turns to God, but it does not mean that a man may continue to be his old self, and yet sit down at the feast.

MANY CALLED, FEW CHOSEN

This is one of the most difficult of all the sayings

of our Lord. Perhaps, as He had only told of one man cast out of the feast, He wanted the disciples to understand that the one was typical of many, who would apparently accept the call but in the end be rejected. It is important to notice that the rejection was the man's own fault. He was not chosen, because he had not shown himself worthy, not because he had been predestinated to be cast out. The words in no sense deny the reality of human responsibility. But it is sadly true that it has only been the minority at any period that has responded to the Christian ideal, and so "elected" to become the elect people of God.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. John iv. 46-54)

WE may take this story as illustrating *the education of faith*. There are four stages in this process of education.

FAITH IN THE POWER OF JESUS CHRIST

The faith that comes.—Men came to Jesus from various motives, but He always knew the cry of real need. The multitude thronged Him, but it was the hand of need that touched Him (S. Luke viii. 45). The reality of his need made this royal official (perhaps, as some have conjectured, Chuza, Herod's steward—see S. Luke viii. 3) humble and energetic. He was *humble*, for he was willing to beseech the peasant-teacher to help him. Social distinctions melt away in face of the real facts of sickness and death and sorrow. And he was *energetic*. He "went away" (that is the word

in verse 47) leaving his sick boy at the point of death, prepared to make every possible effort to save him. Our Lord knew all this, but He knew also how immature the faith of the man was. He had only as yet thought of Jesus Christ as a "faith-healer" who possessed some extraordinary power over sickness. He wanted to see the magic act done. For the sake of His disciples and the people, as well as for the man himself, our Lord set Himself to lift the man's faith to a higher level.

FAITH IN THE COMPASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

The faith that pleads.—Like the Syrophenician woman, the man was moved to more earnest prayer by the apparent discouragement of the words of Christ. He felt that he was in the presence of a love that would respond. No appeal to the compassion of our Lord ever failed to evoke an immediate response (S. Mark ix. 22). Notice how each step in the education of this man's faith corresponded to a deeper insight into the character of Jesus Christ. He saw the miracles first; now he saw the sympathy that lay behind the miracles—the heart that cared.

FAITH IN THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHRIST

The faith that obeys.—It was a difficult test—the demand to accept the bare word of Jesus without any other evidence (S. John xx. 29). As in so many other cases, our Lord told the man to act on the assumption that his prayer has been answered. It was just after noon (1.0 p.m.) when he left Jesus, and he had about twenty miles to go. He would hardly have come on foot; and it would seem that he did not start homeward till the evening, reaching home after sunset (hence "yesterday" in the

servants' reply). Some have seen in this delay an evidence of his faith ; but the delay may have been due to many other causes. Our Lord's words might have meant no more than " Your boy is going to recover " ; what made it clear that they did mean more was the instantaneous disappearance of the fever at the very time that the words were spoken.

FAITH IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

The faith that saves.—Where S. John uses the word " believe " alone, it always has this full sense (*compare* i. 7 ; iv. 42 ; vi. 36 ; xi. 15). Jesus had shown that distance was no bar to the communication of His power. So distance was no bar to discipleship. Faith is compounded of reverence, gratitude and loyalty—reverence for the power of Jesus ; gratitude for the compassion of Jesus ; and loyalty to the authority of Jesus. So faith was transformed from an act into an attitude. This is the first of the four Christian households of which we hear in the New Testament—the other three being those of Cornelius (Acts x. 24), Lydia (xvi. 15), and the Philippian gaoler (xvi. 34).

(5) It is interesting to compare this story with the somewhat similar story of the centurion in S. Matthew viii., S. Luke vii. Here a weak faith was strengthened ; there a strong faith was commended. Here a request to come was met by a word of healing ; there the response, " I will come and heal him," is met by the counter-request, " Speak in a word, and my servant shall be healed." Both miracles were wrought at Capernaum. Would it be too fanciful to suggest that the centurion had heard of the healing of the nobleman's son, and

was emboldened to ask of Jesus the healing of his servant by a similar word of power? Is it not possible that when our Lord said that He had not found so great faith—no, not in Israel—He might have been thinking of this Jewish officer, who had not believed at first, that a word would suffice to meet his need?

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Matthew xviii. 21-35)

IN this parable our Lord is laying down the law of forgiveness. It tells us:

THE CONDITIONS OF FORGIVENESS

First, there is *willingness to recognise*. The servant does not plead extenuating circumstances, or remain speechless, like the man in the other parable (S. Matthew xxii. 12). Like the publican (S. Luke xviii. 13) he appeals for mercy. The acknowledgment of sin is the first condition of the divine forgiveness (2 Sam. xii. 13). Then, secondly, there is the *desire for restitution*. Of course, restitution was impossible. The ten thousand talents could never be paid. But there can be no true repentance that does not want to undo the past, however impossible it may be. The promise, "I will pay thee all," is vain, but the spirit behind it is like the spirit of the prodigal's prayer, "Make me as one of thy hired servants"—let me begin again from the beginning. Is not that what Jesus meant when He said that we must be converted and become as little children? We must want to begin again.

THE CHARACTER OF FORGIVENESS

First, it is *immediate*. There is no period of probation, no adjournment of the case. The prayer is answered before the echo of it has died away (Isa. lxxv. 24). Then, it is *unconditional*. The man is not asked to commit himself to any specific promise ; he is put on his honour ; gratitude will teach him, if he is capable of learning, what the King's forgiveness implies. But there can be no bargain between the insolvent debtor and his lord. Then, it is *complete*. The whole debt is cancelled (Col. ii. 14). When God forgives, the sin is as though it had not been. Its results are not cancelled—the squandered talents cannot come back—but as a barrier between the King and His servant, the whole evil record stands cancelled. A red line runs across the page, and a new account is opened. That is how God forgives.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF FORGIVENESS

The kingdom of grace has its own laws. Forgiveness is not merely the cancelling of the past, it is a new birth—a new ideal. The meanness of the servant seems incredible, yet it is sadly true to life. For this is what an unforgiving spirit means. It is worth noticing that the fellow-servant recognises the debt and desires to pay. He is a repentant brother (S. Matthew xviii. 15 ; S. Luke xvii. 3). Real forgiveness is impossible unless there is repentance, for real forgiveness means the restoration of the right relationship. We have no right to ask forgiveness of those we have wronged unless we at least wish to redress the wrong. It may

be impossible to do, but we cannot ask for forgiveness while we are benefiting by the wrong that we have done.

The lesson of the parable is not "forgive in order to be forgiven," but "forgive because you have been forgiven." God gives us the status of free men that we may live the life of freedom. That is what justification by faith means. He calls us His sons that we may become like Him (Gal. iv. 6).

So the condemnation of the unmerciful servant is that he has accepted the grace of the King without being conformed to the image of the King. Perhaps the words, "he found a fellow-servant," mean more than a casual meeting. Straight from the royal presence he went to look for the man who was in his debt. It is sadly true that from the heights of spiritual exaltation a man may drop to the depths of degradation.

(4) One last thought. The indignation of the fellow-servants did not take the form of an attack on the man; they "came and told their lord all that was done." The attempt to set ourselves up as judges of the actions of others may easily lead us to wrong conclusions. But at the bar of God we may plead the cause of the oppressed. "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord" (*see* Jude verse 9). Only that perfect justice which is also perfect love can fully understand. There must be an awful truth in the picture of the cancelling of the divine forgiveness, but the dread sentence can come only from the lips of God. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Matthew xxii. 15-22)

THE Pharisees and Herodians little thought how great a service they were doing to after-ages in giving our Lord the opportunity of formulating the Christian ideal of citizenship. It was a strange alliance, for the Pharisees made the claims of religion an excuse for repudiating the right of secular authority, while the Herodians were politicians to whom the claims of religion were subordinate to the duty of supporting the Herodian dynasty. It is noteworthy that our Lord, in His answer, ignores Herod altogether, and goes back to the real authority behind. He invites His questioners to face the reality of the political situation.

Two kinds of coins circulated in Palestine—the old Hebrew coinage, in which the “tribute” for the maintenance of the Temple was paid (see S. Matthew xvii. 27), and the Roman coinage, of which the *denarius* was the standard coin (“shilling” would be a better translation than “penny,” which rather corresponds to the *as* or *assarion*—S. Matthew x. 29, Luke xii. 6). It was a *denarius* that they brought to Jesus.

Our Lord's answer tells us three things about the claim of the State.

THE GROUND OF THE CLAIM

Coinage implies the right to govern, to give order and security to commercial and social life. In the first century the Pax Romana stood between the

world and anarchy. It was a reasonable demand that in return for this security the financial requirements of the State should be met. There is a duty that a man owes to the community to which he belongs ; he has no right simply to repudiate that duty while enjoying the advantages of the civil system. S. Paul echoes the word of our Lord in Rom. xiii. 7.

THE NATURE OF THE CLAIM

The *denarius* was a "thing that was Cæsar's," because in a sense all property is the creation of the State, which guarantees to the individual the peaceable enjoyment of his possessions. A man has no right to use what is his own without regard to the common good ; the State has a claim on him and his. He is bound to give back in service the equivalent to what he receives in protection. The institution of private property can only be justified by showing that it ministers to the common good. This does not mean that the State has the right to confiscate the property of the individual. The question how much is Cæsar's is a very complicated one ; all that is implied in the words of our Lord is that the community has a claim that an honourable man is bound to recognise.

THE LIMITS OF THE CLAIM

The claim of the State is not paramount ; behind it is the claim of God. Where the two come into conflict, the Christian man dare not hesitate which to recognise ; though a refusal to obey the laws of our country is a step only to be taken with a deep sense of responsibility and willingness to abide the consequences. Our Lord never

allowed men to believe that our duty to our neighbour could take the place of our duty to God. Life must reach upward as well as outward. (For the opposite danger see S. Mark vii. 11, 1 John iv. 20, 21.) The *denarius* in the hand of Jesus symbolised the twofold character of human life. The silver dug out of God's earth had been shaped and stamped by human effort. Its substance was of God's providing, its form was of man's devising. So He Who held the *denarius* in His hand was of divine substance minted in the currency of earth. As divine, He expressed the claim of God on human allegiance; as human, He expressed the claim of humanity.

(4) Every truth is like a coin—its substance is like the precious metal, its form is stamped by human effort. And as it passes from hand to hand its form becomes worn with use, so that sometimes it must be re-minted, not because its substance has changed its value, but because the "image and superscription" that gave it currency have become obscured. But it is one thing to re-mint the coinage of truth; it is another to debase the currency. We must render the truth to men, for it is their right; but we must guard the truth for God, for it is His. It is the business of the Church to re-state the truth, that Caesar may have his due; but it must be the whole truth, or God is robbed of His right. So the true scribe "brings out of his treasure things new and old" (S. Matthew xiii. 52)—new in form, as changes in human thought may need; but old in substance, for the substance of truth does not change.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(S. Matthew ix. 18-26)

THE two miracles included in these verses are associated together in all three Gospels. As is often the case, S. Matthew gives the bare facts shorn of the detail added by the other Evangelists. A comparison of the two miracles brings out :

THE DIFFERENCE OF CONDITION

(1) Jairus' daughter was a child of twelve ; the woman was of mature age, and had suffered from her complaint for as long a period as the child had lived. (2) The claim of Jairus was strongly supported by his influential position, as one of the rulers of the synagogue of Capernaum, and by his courageous faith ; the woman was an inconspicuous unit in the crowd that pressed around Jesus as He went with Jairus. (3) Jairus' faith was publicly asserted, and the circumstances of his need laid open before the crowd ; the woman stole through the crowd unnoticed, guarding her secret from all men. (4) All that the little child could offer was the negative faith that responded to the touch of Jesus ; the woman brought the active faith that touched Him first. So varied were the outer circumstances of those who came to Him with their need ; so varied are they still.

THE IDENTITY OF NEED

Below all differences of outward condition, lay the common need of both. When Jairus came to

Jesus, the life of his daughter was ebbing away fast ; and the life of the woman had been ebbing away slowly for twelve years. It was life that both needed. And it was life that both received. In both cases life came through contact with Jesus. For the idea of the sacredness of the blue fringe on the garment, see Numbers xv. 38-40. In the action of the woman, we may recognise humility rather than mere superstition. Yet in the action of Christ we may see a warning against the danger of allowing the supernatural to deteriorate into the magical. Faith is an instinct, but it is meant to be an intelligent instinct (*cp.* 1 Cor. xiv. 15). So the faith of this woman was first rewarded and then trained. A very unintelligent faith may be real and true, but we must learn to understand as well as to believe (S. Luke xxiv. 45).

The woman's cure was incomplete till she had made public confession of her healing ; but the story of Jairus' daughter illustrates the opposite danger. There had been too much publicity ; the death-chamber was full of noise and lamentation, and the atmosphere of calm confidence, in which alone the healing power of Jesus could manifest itself, had first to be created. So the hired mourners were cast out, and only a little group of faithful men were permitted to see the restoration of the dead child to life. It was not in noisy crowds, but in quiet places, that the miraculous power of Jesus Christ flowed forth most freely to heal the sicknesses of men (Isa. xlii. 2 ; S. Mark vii. 33).

THE SACRAMENTAL TOUCH

What is the bearing of these two miracles on our sacramental system ? Are we wrong in believing

that God works through "outward and visible signs"? No, but we are wrong if we think of the sacraments as having virtue in themselves apart from the gracious Presence of Him Who makes them the channels of His healing power. Our Lord often used outward signs, but it was not the outward sign, but the divine power and love, that brought healing and salvation. We must look through the sacrament to the Christ Who reaches through it to touch our lives, as He took the damsel by the hand. Our touch is a touch of need, His touch is a touch of power. And in the sacraments they meet.

The Fathers contrast the pressure of the throng with the touch of the woman. *Cura premit, fides tangit*—care presses, faith touches (*Augustine*). When our Lord watched the crowds thronging up the Temple steps, He saw the one poor widow whose gift was worth more than all the rest. "He hath filled the hungry with good things"—for the hungry are those who draw near with a deep sense of personal need. Our need may be our own secret, but our gratitude must not be ashamed to confess "what He hath done for our soul."

SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE ADVENT

(S. John vi. 5-14)

WE have already considered this Gospel where it is appointed for the Fourth Sunday in Lent ("Refreshment Sunday"). Let us think of it now especially in its bearing on Holy Communion. Whatever may have been the case with the other evangelists, it can hardly be doubted that S. John

has the Eucharist in mind when he records the story. It tells of the threefold co-operation of our Lord with His disciples.

CO-OPERATION IN SYMPATHY WITH HUMAN NEED

The people are hungry, and the responsibility for meeting their need lies on Him and on us. Like S. Philip, we are tempted to say that we have no resources adequate to meet the demand that is made on us. We think that we could do more if our organisation were better, our finances more adequate, our clergy more numerous and efficient. But what if after all these are not the things we need most? What if our supreme need is more sympathy with the purpose of Jesus Christ? "This He said to prove him"—to awaken his sense of compassion and responsibility. Every true priest will prepare for his Eucharist by trying to realise afresh that he is charged with the responsibility of ministering to the need of the people. And the realisation of his own inadequacy will send him back to the Divine fountain of strength. Nothing in ourselves; all things through Him. We are strongest when we feel most the sense of our own helplessness; for then we are thrown back on dependence on Him.

CO-OPERATION IN PROVISION

The sacraments are the outward and visible sign of the truth that God has chosen to make His grace depend on human agency. There is something that human hands must supply—water, bread, and wine—simple things like the barley-cakes and fishes that S. Andrew persuaded the lad to offer. But what are they among so many—how can simple

things like these meet the deep needs of the hungry multitude? It is so little that we have to give. Again, it is the disciples who are charged to gather the people to the feast. It is not a mere crowd, but an organised community that sits down in ranks (S. Mark vi. 40) on the green grass. Disorder and confusion have no place in the divine purpose (1 Cor. xiv. 33, 40). There is something almost ceremonial about the marshalling of the people. Even the number is recorded, as a clergyman records the number of his communicants.

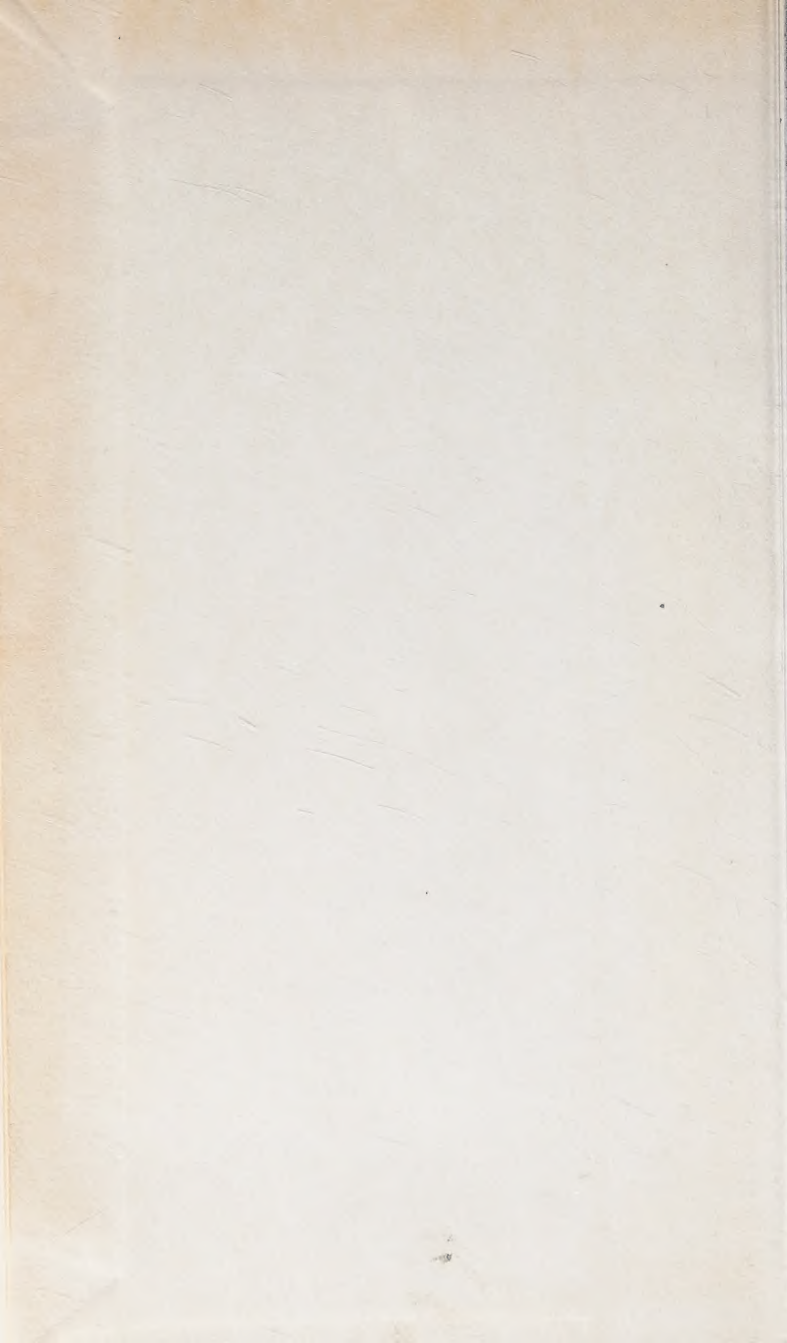
CO-OPERATION IN DISTRIBUTION

He receives and blesses the bread, but He gives it to His disciples to distribute to the people. They are to be the mediators of His grace. The tremendous responsibility of the priestly office lies in the fact that we are entrusted with the task of conveying His divinely-provided supply to the hungry and the needy. If the people are not fed, it is not that His supplies have failed, but that we, His disciples, have not "distributed to them that were set down." Perhaps we have grown weary of the task, or have been too anxious to keep the gift for ourselves; or have doubted the fulness of His resources.

(4) But what of the people? They are not mere passive recipients of His bounty. They illustrate the threefold demand of faith. There is *the faith that comes*—assured that somehow the need will be supplied; then *the faith that obeys*—sitting down in orderly quiet, believing that what seems impossible will somehow come to pass; then *the faith that receives*, reaching out, not to question or wonder, but to take. How has it all come about? We were

hungry, but now we are satisfied ; we were weary, but now we are refreshed. It all reads so simply—like the Holy Communion service in some village church, with no accessories of pomp and ceremonial, but just a gathering of hungry people asking to be fed with the True Bread from heaven. But there is a moment when simple things become charged with infinite significance ; when Eternal Love transforms the inadequate human offering. And still men see the miracle that Jesus does, and realise that behind the gift is the Giver—" the Prophet that should come into the world."





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